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THE MAN BETWEEN

"She was looking up into his face, the violet eyes raining tears"

THE MAN BETWEEN

BY

WALTER ARCHER FROST

Illustrations by
Howard McCormick

L.C.

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1913

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THIS BOOK IS
DEDICATED TO MY
FATHER AND MOTHER

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Two Aliens in Durban	3
II.	Exiles	11
III.	South Africa	31
IV.	Stranded	39
V.	Thokolosi, the Evil One, the Poisoner	48
VI.	Strangers to South Africa	65
VII.	Staying On	75
VIII.	That Night at the Regent	84
IX.	It Is Not Good for Man to Be Alone	99
X.	Morning	105
XI.	The Fruit of Seven Hours	115
XII.	The Wisdom of Hammerstone	124
XIII.	The World Went On Again	128
XIV.	Whom Chadwell Left Behind	134
XV.	Flight	144
XVI.	The Singer's Rooms	151
XVII.	On the Rennie Dock at Eleven-Forty-Five	159
XVIII.	The One Thing Left to Do	165
XIX.	In Recognition of the Truth	169
XX.	Importers and Exporters of Australian Wools	175
XXI.	Where the Truth Had No Place	182
XXII.	The Victor and the Spoils	189
XXIII.	In the Direction of the Truth	197

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXIV.	Greg's Malady	201
XXV.	Fear	210
XXVI.	The English Violet	216
XXVII.	Alone	224
XXVIII.	Waiting	232
XXIX.	Kimberley	240
XXX.	Durban	249
XXXI.	Adrift	260
XXXII.	With the Current	267
XXXIII.	America	273
XXXIV.	Victoria	279
XXXV.	The Man Between	284

ILLUSTRATIONS

"She was looking up into his face, the violet eyes raining tears" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"'Death shall come fast to those who have earned the nGaka's curse'" 90

"'Tell Greg and Ormsby I've gone after Fraser and Chadwell'" 156

"The big man stared on at him" 282

THE MAN BETWEEN

CHAPTER I

TWO ALIENS IN DURBAN

"FOR one thing, he's terribly well off," said Anne Netherby. "And that makes him a novelty in Durban."

The girl to whom she spoke did not answer. She would have been more than human if she had not taken one more glance into the pier-glass. But it was only a very brief glance — one which almost timidly approved the general effect of her rose-coloured gown, cut only so low as to show the tips of her soft shoulders, then coming, with but a slight dip, across her breast.

She was nervous and she knew it; and the emotion was the more disturbing because she was powerless to identify its source. In an effort to distract her thoughts, she straightened her tall young body and looked full into the pier-glass, raising her brows, to discipline a mutinous curl which framed, though she had neither guessed nor been told it, the famed "widow's peak." She had heard only a little of what Anne had been saying, but she assembled the fragments, and answered:

"Yes, but that's only as far as you got before. Can't you be nice, and really tell me something about him? Not what he's worth, but what he *is* besides being just another well-to-do American?"

"Well-to-do?" Miss Netherby sent her hands away.

"I imagine it's because you're just out here from England, but you won't be twenty-four hours more in Durban without finding we don't speak of money that way here! Not in South Africa! And, even if we did, your 'well-to-do' wouldn't describe John Tyler Ormsby."

"Yes, I know. He's been trying out Kimberley, hasn't he?"

"He's been *torturing* it! He's treated it the same way he did — what do they call it? Wall Street? in New York. Greg says the man descended on Kimberley six weeks ago, from there, with no one knows how many millions, and, in that time, has actually doubled them. Everything he touches turns into money! He ——"

Still the girl frowned, her level brows coming slightly together over her violet eyes:

"But, don't you see, Anne, dear, you haven't yet given me any real picture of him. I want to know ——" She hesitated an instant. "Anne, is he young or old, small or large, athletic or stupid, blond or dark? Is he a sportsman, a reader, or just an idler, when he's not demoralizing the market? I mean — is he anything in the world besides a money-making machine?"

Miss Netherby shook her head, smiling. "How direct we are! The penalty of associating with four strenuous brothers!" She patted the girl's rounded arm. "But Mr. Ormsby's a lot besides what I've told you: for one thing, Greg says —— Oh, mother dear, do come and see Marian: it's the first time I've ever seen her with her hair up, and in an evening gown!" She caught the resisting girl in her arms. "There, mother, you and dad say I'm pretty, sometimes; but just see *her!*"

Lady Netherby took the young girl in her arms tenderly. There was a caress in that gentle pressure more marked for the suggestion of repression which the older woman's thin face habitually bore. She touched the girl's soft cheek, smiled, and sighed.

"Lady Bam and Sir Roger will take care of you," she said; "and" — with a backward glance from one fair blushing face to the other — "as an older sister, Anne, you must be very watchful. This is her first evening in South Africa."

The girl turned more fully toward her. "Why, Lady Netherby, you surely don't fancy ——" She breathed deeply and squared her slim shoulders boyishly: "With you and Lord Netherby and Anne, I'm really back in England. Africa's fascinating, from what little I've seen of it. I'm sure ——"

"That we shall keep you quite safe, Roland, myself, and Anne."

"And Greg," Anne laughed. "Don't forget Greg," she warned.

"Yes," Lady Netherby smiled, "and Greg."

"Though he won't be needed for *that*," Anne boasted, "for I'm really old now, mother. I'm *engaged*."

"But that must not make you heedless," said her mother. "Greg I know and trust, as I've showed you both. And his friends are Englishmen. But Lady Bam has included, this evening, an American, and" — she frowned slightly — "so many Americans are —— But we will trust Lady Bam's discernment. He's undoubtedly all that she believes."

"Oh, do tell me something of what she believes, Lady

Netherby. Anne says he's to take me in, and it's such a help to know something in advance about the man who's going to take you in."

'By Jove! you two are visions," a man's voice broke in. "But come: rickshaw's ready. Got it for your benefit, Miss Langmaid. A rickshaw's South African, and more suitable for your first evening than a taxi-cab."

"It's Greg," Anne laughed. "Come in, eavesdropper, who's punished, by over-hearing us talking about Mr. Ormsby and not yourself."

"Right O," Bradbroke laughed, gallantly raising his fiancée's hand to his lips. "About Ormsby now: he's quite in a class by himself. That's all I'm going to tell you of him — that he's very much all right, and that he's undoubtedly standing on the club steps, wondering what's become of us, provided no one's told him that people I take anywhere are always late. Oh, I say, Lady Netherby, you mustn't, you know; it's perfectly proper for the girls to come with me without a maid. In England, I know. But this is South Africa. Come, Anne! Miss Langmaid, look lively!" He nodded his closely cropped head in mock severity, and, gathering up what little was to be carried, led the way.

Anne smiled as she looked after his long, slender, square-shouldered figure, the trim waist, the dark head held well back, the lithe, elastic step, the "cavalry swing," which always harked back, in her thoughts, to the days when he had served his country so dashingly in the Kaffir Rebellion and the Boer war, in evidence of which hung the stars upon his breast. Handsome and debon-

aire was Gregory Bradbroke. Whatever his inner self might pronounce in the way of verdict on him, it detracted nothing from the charm of his lean face, or his fine eyes of the colour of burnt wood, which told as little of inner secrets as his clean-cut, smiling lips. What he suffered, he suffered bravely. Anne might well have been excused for the light which shone in her dark eyes, for Bradbroke had been, and still was, the source of more than one head full of vain and girlish dreams.

"Isn't he a dear?" she smiled to Marian, as they followed him down the path to the waiting rickshaw. "We'll imagine it's a taxicab, dear, and that this is Piccadilly Circus instead of Essenwood Road, London instead of Durban, England instead of South Africa. Something's got to bring it about for us, Marian!" Then, with a sudden bitterness which knew no reserve, though it proffered no explanation, "We've *got* to have it: we can't go on this way much longer!" Her hand had found the young girl's with a sudden, fierce strength, then relaxed as suddenly. Greg had reached the rickshaw, and they had come up with him. In another instant they had entered it, with Anne laughing some comment a little too brilliantly; and they were on their way.

It was one of those matchless nights in February: the air as soft as an American or an English June, the African moon a bare, golden horn flung high on a cloudless, star-gemmed sky. There was hardly a breath of wind, and what there was, welled in from the Indian Ocean, which slept at the foot of the already sleeping street. It was

Durban, the city of apparently endless, almost oppressively prosaic peace.

Anne leaned wistfully against Greg's shoulder, and he pressed her hand as if reading her mood from her silence and her averted eyes.

And Marian, watching until she became aware of her scrutiny, saw that wistfulness and the man's response to it. Suddenly, then, she felt very much alone: no, this was not England. Instead, it was a land of enigmas, of unreality: or, rather, it was a land of realities too subtle to be held or even to be detected, fully, by the Occidental mind. Just before she had sailed from England to become Anne Netherby's guest for a month, at Durban, she had heard one of her father's friends say:

"In Buluwayo, in Matabeleland, there's a statue of Cecil Rhodes staring into the northward over Africa. I've seen it, and always thought *he ought to have looked south: there's more to see.*" She had heard him say that, and it had puzzled her. But she understood better now: already had come to her the first touch of the unceasing, never-to-be-answered riddle of South Africa. Nothing had voiced it to her through the unbroken silence. Indeed — and she half felt it — the very silence had spoken it to her well-nigh aloud. She had heard it, and it was still addressing her. And she wondered what it would say to her, what it had already said to *Anne.* Beyond question, Anne had changed much since coming to South Africa. That was patent. Marian had seen it at once. This was not the Anne of England, or the Anne who had written those happy letters from Durban. That Anne had been carefree. This Anne was desperate.

And what was to flow from her desperation? Nothing outré, the girl told herself, for Anne would never lend herself to that. But desperation and South Africa ——? Covertly, as the rickshaw slid by each street-lamp, the girl fell to studying Bradbroke's profile: if worse came to worst, what could be expected definitely from Gregory Bradbroke? She compared his graceful slenderness with her brothers' bulk, and remembered their agreeing, with youthful sageness, that in a street-fight, "nothing counted so much as a chap's weighing fourteen stone." She was young enough to remember that without smiling, and sufficiently a judge of physique to set Bradbroke's weight at two stone, and probably three, under that. And, back of the estimate and through it, she was asking herself if Bradbroke could take the right care of Anne.

And the silence, which had seemed to release her for a moment, pressed down again. There was no relief from it now: no sound behind them or before; even the "boy," bending low before the following rickshaw, seemed to slide, incapable of sound. Silence, deep and unending. What did it presage? What lay within it? Again, the girl was aware of a strange, fateful loneliness, that and something else, suddenly uppermost — an unnameable fear for Anne, who seemed, as suddenly, very far from her. To whom could she turn, in this ill-boding isolation? To some one she must turn! But to whom? She was utterly alone, an alien in Durban! And the fact and the weight of her need pressed so heavily that she hardly heard Bradbroke's laughing whisper:

"Here we are, Miss Langmaid, and there he is, waiting just as I said!"

"Who?" she asked, automatically, her eyes held by the figure of a man who was swiftly descending to them.

"Who?" Bradbroke's whisper demanded derisively. "Why, the fourteen-stone Human Mint, of course! John Ormsby, that big chap just coming down the steps!"

CHAPTER II

EXILES

IN THE half-light, and under cover of the introductions, she saw, at first, only a towering outline, beside which Greg's grace gained a still more significant slenderness. Yet the American stood as easily as the slighter Englishman. Used as she was to splendidly fit human animals, the girl approved the American's poise, the width and the lines of his shoulder, and their depth, and the swell of his sleeve, which she divined rather than saw, just below the tip of his shoulder, when he gave her his hand. She wondered if his eyes went well with that wonderful physique of his. So many times, in this way, men had disappointed her.

She little realized the detail of her scrutiny, and that she was promising herself still further examination, when they should come into the light and he talked with her.

What would be choose to talk about, she next asked herself. Himself, probably. She felt less tense, now, less nervous, less fearful — singularly enough — even for Anne. She could philosophize a little on the probable conceit of a man, who, at such an early age — she conceived that he might be in his late twenties — had won a title so vulgar yet so eloquent as the "Human Mint."

She had met few American men, only half a dozen whom she could remember; and they had been scholars,

thin, narrow-chested, and nervous, as she had been led to believe all Americans were. But *this* American —— She looked up at him again. . . . They were ascending the steps, and he was cautioning her, quite needlessly, she thought, about the turn. Yes, he was not at all like the scholars. Her heel caught in the broken cement of the first landing, and she found herself steadied by an arm suddenly as solid as the preparation on which they stood.

"Fourteen stone," she remembered. "Did you row at college?" she heard herself asking, to her own amazed surprise.

"Yes, by Jove, and loved it!"

His voice was astonishingly deep. It rolled to her, upon her, and over her, one of those all-pervading voices which, no matter how called upon, suggest an inexhaustible reserve.

Before either could speak again, the veranda was before them.

"This way, Ormsby," Greg said lightly. "Lady Bam and Sir Roger, forgive me for making them all late this way. This is Miss Langmaid."

Then, after a little, quick, frank, friendly bow from the silvery-haired woman, who stood by the soldierly Sir Roger, Anne led the way to the dressing-room.

When they emerged, it was to find the others waiting: Hazel Ellicombe, stately and tall, her white throat a pillar, her breast a bank of snow; beside her, Catherine Hetheridge smiled indolently toward Shirley Framleigh, in deserved admiration, for the less statuesque beauty had the features of the Greek and the magnificent hair and

eyes of the highest type of Jew. Anne nodded all 'round to them, but held Marian for a moment:

"Just a word of warning," she whispered laughingly. "Hazel and Shirley are what they look like, but let Catherine Hetheridge talk until you think you've gauged her. That's Shirley over there giggling to Sir Roger," Anne raced on; "pretty soon, she'll tell you how pale you look; and she'll really be anxious about it and ask you to play tennis. Beat her, as you value my friendship. I've lost to her every time. Eh, Shirley, haven't I? I was just telling Marian that you teach me tennis every time I play with you."

The giggling changed to absolutely frank and genuine laughter. "Sorry, Anne, dear; but you really don't play enough to — play. Do *you* play, Miss Langmaid? How delightful! To-morrow? At five? How dear of you! No doubt your racquet's here. Or shall I bring an extra one?"

"If you will," said Marian, amused and eager. She had the wrist of a boy, and she knew it. Loring and Roger, her brothers, had seen to that. She was safe, she felt, even when facing such an enthusiast as Miss Framleigh clearly was.

"Hugh," Anne was bowing to a tall, bronzed, grave man who had been waiting —"Marian, this is Hugh Chadwell, who'll let you ride his worst pony, if you will."

Chadwell bowed. "Delighted. No, beg pardon, Miss Langmaid, I'll give you my favourite, and ride the other beast myself."

He bowed again from his waist, and made way for Carstairs and Jem Fraser, who, with Brett Paxton, was

introduced by Lady Bam, the girl receiving three more bows, simultaneously given, from three more waists, and very trim waists they were, too. In fact, the young girl was struck by the general presentability of these three, and Chadwell, who had preceded them. Man for man, they were well set-up, as Greg was, and like him, even distinguished in feature and manner. She might have met them at any one of the houses on her mother's list at home. She *would* have met them. There would have been no doubt of it. Mammas, she told herself, would have been kind to them. And the daughters of these mammas —— Yes, Messrs. Chadwell, Bradbroke, Carstairs, Paxton, and Fraser would undoubtedly be spoiled, if set down in England. Yet, here in South Africa —— The girl looked from one face to the other, to find them all at ease, frank, interesting, and brown. Attractive, certainly. Paxton and Carstairs seemed the more brilliant; but, on the other hand, Chadwell, apparently the oldest, offered her the more marked deference; and Jem Fraser, blue-eyed and with lips tilting in ready laughter, had his attraction too. They were distinctive, these Englishmen of South Africa. Yet each, as in the case of Gregory Bradbroke, lacked ——

"You'll disconcert them, Marian, if you look at them so frankly," Anne whispered swiftly, smiling, "for they're not used to it. Moreover, since they so evidently take to it, you'll have Shirley and Hazel Ellicombe up in arms."

"What nonsense!" the girl whispered back. "I was simply comparing them with ——"

"Greg. Yes, I know. They're not nearly up to him, are they! There, Lady Bam's allotting us. She's coming

over with Mr. Ormsby. Now, you'll have a chance to find what he's like. He's only 'The Human Mint,' so far."

The girl did not answer, for the big man was standing before her. He seemed to have forgotten that he was among people who knew each other very well and himself scarcely at all. He stood restfully at ease, one straight line from head to heel. She saw that he was taller even than Chadwell. His eyes were brown or a very dark gray, with a frankness of glance which robbed their address of anything not pleasurable. His dark hair curled a little. His face was big-boned, the features strongly marked. He seemed lean, as if in magnificent condition. He was deliberate without being in the least "heavy." She wanted to hear his voice again, and she wondered if it would be as deep and full as when Greg had presented him to them, at the sidewalk. She forgot and forgave him his money, except to resent, in a way which sent the blood to her soft temples, his having been nicknamed so distastefully: he was not at all what those appellations suggested. She could not imagine ——! She waited for him to speak.

He did not do so at once. He was not ready. He was mutely thanking the woman who had attired her in the modest gown — sweet, modest, and simple, like her youth. He was thinking that, if he could just stand and look down at her —— Her hair was very full and soft. It flowed away from what tried to restrain it. It was not merely yellow: it had the rare, glinting red of gold. Her face was a perfect oval. Her low forehead was broad. Her carriage both appealed and commanded. She had

a thoroughly distinctive little chin. A dimple danced just beyond where the marvel of her lips ended. There was no describing the colour which bathed her soft cheeks. But her eyes were deep, deep, deep, shy and gentle, like English violets. That was it! It had come to him with so sudden an inspiration that he felt he must tell her about it. Her colour rose, and she lifted slender fingers to her widow's peak as if the flood frightened her and she wished to hide its radiance from his eyes. Instantly, he knew the remorse of one who, unwittingly, has committed a felony. Lady Bam saved them both by leading the way with Jem Fraser into the dining-room.

There, under the softer but more adjacent illumination of the candles, the girl realized that he was even less than she had thought like her earlier American acquaintances. For his face was brown and red at once. But he seemed, suddenly, to have become old and severe. She said to herself:

"He must be nearly thirty-five." Then, for he had smiled quickly and his every feature had shared it, she corrected, "I mean thirty, or twenty-eight."

He thought, "She's not over eighteen!" He meant that he was glad that one of his antiquity had been chosen to take care of her. "Thank God, she's so feminine!" Aloud he said, "I wonder how many find what they come for, in South Africa." He looked around the table, with his free, unhurried glance, and waited.

His poise had its effect on her, and she smiled quietly.

"I was thinking the same thing — I mean asking myself the same question. I'm afraid that many find only

sorrow and disappointment — if what one hears is true. But *these* men have evidently ——"

He nodded. "Yes, how happy they look! We're strangers, almost, to them, so far, and that gives us a little latitude in comparing opinions, particularly since our gossip is complimentary. So, we can go ahead! See that fellow, for example. I don't remember his name, but ——"

His almost invisible gesture indicated young Jem Fraser, who was dilating on some shooting he'd just done "up country"; and both, watching the glow in the boy's fine eyes, smiled.

"Not bad. Not at all bad, old chap," Carstairs broke in. "I admit birds are all well enough in their way; but come north with me — not very far either, mind, and we'll do the *antelope*. Take you off with me, next week, you and Paxton."

"And miss the best of the cricket?" Paxton demanded. He was in his late twenties, but his laugh lightened his moody eyes, and relaxed his teeming nerves. "Give up cricket for hunting? No, indeed!"

Chadwell turned to Lady Bam at his left: "Dissuade them, please; we need 'em too bad for the club theatricals. I'll look after Paxton myself. He's writing the lyrics, and I'm on the lines, and he knows I won't let him out of my sight."

"I surrender," laughed Fraser. "It's not often one's so appreciated during *life*. Must be acknowledged. Succumb, Carstairs. Hugh's adamant. But"— with a smile which included the entire table —"when you see us on the boards, you'll wish Hugh'd let us go."

Miss Ellicombe had waited. "The races, remember, come a week earlier this year. The track's absolutely perfect. And Gerald Trennery's bringing his string up from the Cape entire. You know what I mean," she remonstrated; "you men will, anyway, so don't be so giggly, Shirley. I mean he's going to bring *all* his string."

"Of course we understand, Hazel," soothed Catherine Hetheridge. "We were merely —— Do we strike you as terribly good-for-nothing, Mr. Ormsby!" she asked suddenly. She was tall and willowy, a little past her first beauty and relying, now, on a blasé leisureliness of manner for her charm. She ignored Marian Langmaid, and, as far as letting her eyes rest on him, the big man, too. "Yes, I know we do," she went on. "You are so — what shall I say? superiorly energetic, in the States." Still, she did not look at him. She seemed to be speaking unconsciously, to be, in fact, merely thinking aloud, as if she had happened to find the American a tenant of her idle mind for an idle moment; the whole matter, the most inconsequential of incidents. So that there was not the least flattery in her address, as little, in fact, as in what she had said.

And, while the girl at his side, catching the little fling in the words and knowing that the taunt was meant to allure, waited, the big man smiled, and said with his singular directness:

"I don't know whether we're energetic or not. We get things done, and have a good time doing it. That's our National Game. I don't know much about yours down here, so far; but I judge it makes all of you just as comfortable."

It was not what Catherine had expected. And she had expected, as little, that he should give her only the briefest of glances while delivering it. She leaned forward a little, resting her elbow on the cloth of the table, and though she knew that the device would be patent to every one of the women, raised a beautifully rounded arm until it formed a wondrous support for her delicately pointed chin.

"Really, now, do you think so? Down here, we — well ——" She looked away from him again. "We hear so much of what the *Times* calls your 'restless energy.'" She sent her blue eyes idly back to him. She knew that they were unusual eyes. The superintendent of the Crown Deep Mine, after trying to read his heaven in them, had told her that they were just the colour of the blue soil about Kimberley; but, since that scientific and technical young man had added the word "diamondiferous," his assay had not helped him, for other gazers into those limpid crystals had called them *hard.*

But she had forgotten the superintendent's double entendu, and now devoted her oddly blue eyes as she rarely did. "I'm sure that you are all frightfully energetic," she confided to the swell of her arm as it flowed into her elbow. "The *Times* is always right."

The American smiled on the table generally. "I wrote a letter to its editor once: he had 'run' an editorial which described Harvard as a university ruled by fraternities."

"And," Catherine interrupted satirically, "you instructed him. It must have been a pleasure — that!"

"It was: all I did was to tell him that there were no

fraternities there, with the exception of a few strays no one ever heard of, and hadn't been for probably a good thirty years."

"Meaning ——?" she asked without interest.

"That I think the *Times* may be just as mistaken when it describes our Energy as our National Calamity."

She shook her head. "I'm afraid you're terribly brainy as well as energetic, for I can't follow you. Hugh," turning to Chadwell, "get him to try to explain what he means to you, some time, then tell me what you make of it. Lady Bam, why don't we form a woman's club, and have a room like this in it? It's really exquisite."

She had addressed the older woman with the same, lazily uninterested manner which she had employed on the American; then, as if she had forgotten that she had addressed either, smiled.

During the talk which followed — Chadwell had rallied with a promise to get an explanation from Ormsby, and Lady Bam had seconded Catherine's recognition of the room — the American turned to the girl beside him: "You've not been down here long, Miss Langmaid. I guess that, at once."

She smiled at his use of the word "guess," finding it so proverbially American. But she won a question from his frank statement.

"Why do you fancy that I have come recently?"

"Because all this is as novel to you as it is to me. By Jove! it's not like anything either of us expected to find here, so far away from any big centre, in fact anywhere in South Africa! That's straightaway evident. I know it was provincial of me, but I expected to find

Durban like — well, like any other little town of its size; whereas"— he swung his alert eyes over the table—"it's much like what you've seen in London, and I've seen there and in Boston and New York."

He waited. Then, since she did not answer at once, "I wonder how long they've been down here — I mean in South Africa. Of course I don't mean Miss Netherby. The others. Lady Bam, I should say — she and her husband — for a long time, though it's only because I know Sir Roger's the big man in the local government. But the others, I wonder what started them here from England, and what keeps them here. Why," his lowered voice suddenly intense, "how they must long for home — and I know that means England. How these men and these girls must downright hunger for it! Yet, South Africa seems to have fascinated every one of them. You see, they have n't said a word about England. It's all 'South Africa.'

"Yes," she said, thoughtfully, "I've noticed that. I wonder ——"

Lady Bam rose and the others followed to the veranda, first, then drifted idly into the lounge, the largest of the club's private rooms.

The Regent Club was built, after the manner of South African clubs, all on one floor, like a bungalow. Its western windows looked toward the barrier of the veldt, on which they gave without a single skyscraper breaking the vista — now one pile of dark, foreboding gloom. The stars hung low, then were blotted out by the embanking horizon. The American thought that by day it would be much like the skyline about Kimberley, the only place

he knew, so far, in South Africa. In fact, there was little to be gained, in the way of natural reward of glance, from those wide-thrown, western windows; and he led the girl to the opposite side of the long room, and pointed to where the lights of the harbour twinkled, for the club was on an elevation, the lights on the swinging vessels, Durban Bay.

She stood silent beside him. He knew, or thought he knew, how her thoughts must have winged north and east to where England lay, far hidden as an unknown world's remotest rim. Was she lonely? Had the strange, almost tangible intensity, which pervaded the atmosphere about them, weighed down this gentle, English girl? He feared it, and came closer to her.

"It's a wonderful night, Miss Langmaid, and, if you'll let me say it, we must take its peace and not try too seriously to plumb South Africa and what it stands for to these people who have chosen it. See how proud they are of it: they're looking from these windows as if for the first time, though every one of them, women and men, must know the view by heart!"

"Yes," she said. "And undoubtedly we'd accept it as they do, if we stayed here as they have. But why don't they speak of *England*, Mr. Ormsby? I'd like ——"

She hesitated, then went on: "I'd like to talk of England with them. I'd like them to ask me about it. These girls must have seen just what I have, there. I mean gone to the same school, my school, though that was in Switzerland. The shops. Why don't they ask me about the shops?" She smiled, perhaps at her own simplicity. But her smile faded, before the thought which followed

it. "Why don't they speak about *home*? I'm prepared to love, at least to like, South Africa, as long as Anne is willing to keep me; but they make me feel that I am from a different part of the world from them; as if we had nothing in common; as if the same things did not interest us, as if we had not the same heritage."

The big man nodded, "I know," he said slowly, as he placed a chair for her, grateful that she sank into it. "I know." He was wondering again at her perfect beauty, her youth, her utter genuineness and naturalness; the joy her colouring was to him; the tribute which, though unguessed by her, she had yielded him with her confidence. "I know," he said again, though unaware that he was repeating himself. "I crossed the continent to a newly opened country, my first year out of college. I thought the opportunities lay there. Maybe they did," he added, with an ingenuousness which matched her own; "but I found the people didn't hark back to what I did. We didn't like the same things. I didn't care for what they did, and they didn't care for what was food and drink to me: the little things, the things life's made up of. Why, I got so homesick to have some one tell me what a wonderful thing it was to take a run through the Berkshires, or give some detail I'd missed, or heard before (I wouldn't have cared which), of the intercollegiate track-meet, or the race with Yale, or who seemed on top at the tournament at Longwood!" He smiled quickly. "You see how empty thirty years have kept me, of the big things! But, by George! I missed it, wanted it! And they didn't like the books I did, out there in that little town. I don't mean I'm a great reader; but you

know how jealous, or zealous, one is for his favourites! I remember I'd just found Leonard Merrick, when I went out there; and got every Tauchnitz he was in, took all of 'em along with me, in my bag. They didn't like Merrick. Or Conrad. No, not even Conrad! You know his 'Lord Jim,' and isn't it wonderful? Well, maybe I was young or wrong or something; but the crowd out there didn't even like 'Lord Jim.' And I was homesick. I've said that before, I know. Homesick? Gad, the salt water. It's the lake there, and fresh. I wanted the *salt* water! I remember, when I started back east again, and saw the tidewater on the Hudson, I cried 'Thalatta' to myself, pretty much as the Greeks did, you remember, when, after they'd been so long inland, in Persia, they came at last again to the sea! I was homesick for the things I liked, the people I knew, the things I wanted to talk about." In his earnestness, he leaned a little toward her, and she kept her position, following his short, strong gestures with her eyes. "I beg your pardon," he said quickly, "I didn't mean to tell you so much about myself. I'm afraid I've sounded preposterous."

"Not at all," the girl answered seriously, "for that's just the way *I* feel, and it relieves me to know that you understand." Then, thinking it might, in another, be taken for criticism of Anne, she added quickly: "But my homesickness will go quickly, Mr. Ormsby. You've been in England," she went on, frankly changing the subject, as she seemed to feel, "don't you love every inch of it?"

"Yes, I do. In a way, I feel three thirds English, for there's a letter in the British Museum, written by John Milton, I mean Cromwell wrote it, and John Milton and

one of my ancestors witnessed it. So, I say, I feel English; I mean, of course, in blood."

"Really," she laughed. And it was supreme evidence of his faith in her honesty that he did not misunderstand her mirth, but kept on, in the same tone:

"Yes. He was a Colonel in Cromwell's army. That branch of the family's living in Bimsted, in Hampshire. I visit them for a little, every time I go over. I've told them, if they ever want to sell me the county, I'll give them their price for it and go over and live there part of every year."

"Oh, my fan!" a voice said woefully, just behind them. It was Catherine Hetheridge. "There it is, right in the way of the next foot, on the sidewalk. Hugh? Why, yes," more languidly, "if you care to, Mr. Ormsby." She dropped into the chair the big man had left. "Really," she smiled to the girl, "he's very presentable, isn't he, for an American? Money makes them so — but then," plucking her gown, and sinking still lower in the chair, "I should be careful, I fancy, for you may have fared better than I, in your acquaintance with Americans."

She turned wearily to study Marian with heavy-lidded eyes, which the girl met quietly. "I haven't met many Americans," Marian said, "but Mr. Ormsby seems very English to me. Doesn't he to you?"

Miss Hetheridge smiled satirically, "That's the Harvard manner, taught them most painstakingly, be sure. They're given it as far back as their prep schools. Englishmen as instructors there and in the colleges; or Americans, who've taken graduate work at Oxford in order to become very English. Imitation's the sincerest form

of flattery, of course; but how ridiculous! I'm forgetting, though: probably you fancy Mr. Ormsby. Thanks very much, Mr. Ormsby. I can't think how I managed it, with all this netting. I was just telling Miss Langmaid that you have the Harvard manner, which you like so because you believe it's English. Oh, don't mind me. I say whatever comes into my head, and both of you might as well become used to it now as later. Did you agree on your views of us? I got down to where you both wondered why we came here in the first place and why we stay. Did either of you make that out?"

"No," said the big man, with a directness which matched her own. "We're still wondering."

Catherine Hetheridge smiled, really smiled, for the first time that evening. "There, that's very clear-cut and satisfactory. I believe you really *are* English, though I never cared greatly for Hampshire, between the two of us. Oh, dear, I'm forgetting you for a third time, dear Miss Langmaid. Forgive me." She patted the girl's soft arm. "What is it about you," studying Marian deliberately. "You have the faculty of making people overlook you. I wonder how you achieve it, I mean do it. How angry you are, Mr. Ormsby! If I were a man, you'd fling me over the railing, I'm sure; but, as it is, you won't so much as touch my fingers, *will* you? But, I'm forgetting *again*. Hugh," she called lazily, "give me a cigarette, there's a dear chap." Without turning, she carried her hand, palm upward, over her right shoulder. Chadwell found the cigarette and held the match for her silently. In the illumination, her arms, shoulders, face, neck and breast flashed from the dead black of her gown

like dull ivory. "There, Hugh," she smiled, "now run away like a good boy, for I've just made Mr. Ormsby furious, and he's too big for you to be brought into it. I was just going to tell you two why we do stay on here," she resumed to the girl and the American. "It's because, well ——" She stopped to send a swift shaft of smoke upward from her thrown-back head. "See here," she broke out, intensely, "in a year or two, I shall marry a man whose father was a Jewish transport-rider. Do you get that? Now, why should I marry such a person? Doesn't that throw some light on the subject?" She held them a further moment then relaxed and laughed softly. "You don't see it yet? What a pair of children! Hugh," she laughed indolently to Chadwell, who, standing, the burnt-out match in his hand, watched her sombrely, "they don't see it's just simply because ——"

Some one struck a chord on the piano. "'Mandalay!' 'Mandalay,' old chap. 'Mandalay!'" came in chorus.

"A pleasure deferred," said Catherine wearily. "Brett Paxton's going to sing."

With the first note, the English girl and the American were sent back to their inquiry, which still lacked an answer. For Paxton's voice had never been given him to waste in a lost corner of the earth like Durban. Sweet, rich, mellow, thrilling, it came to them, a great, natural gift, perfected by study which could not have been found south of the equatorial belt. Indeed, the song was being rendered so rarely that the two might never have heard it before. The fifth verse! What was it? His voice, rare as it was? Or was it something in the singer, something greater, more intimate even than temperament!

They hung on it, as did the others, as it came to them with articulation so perfect that they seemed to see the written words:

"I'm sick o' wastin' leather
On these gritty pavin'-stones,
An' the blawsted Henglish drizzle
Wykes th' fever in me bones . . ."

The singer breathed.

"Blawsted? 'o syes so?" came a hoarse roar from the street. "Not me! Ner you neither! You an' me's all one: you styes 'ere fer w'at keeps me 'ere, th' passage money, an' wot it costs to keep us after we've got 'ome. That an' naught else! Henglish drizzle?" The intruding voice cried fiercely. "'Blawsted! you sye? An' you wild for it, just as *I* am! Caren't you *taiste* it? An' aren't it sweeter than the dust an' *dirt* down 'ere?"

Paxton gasped, and leaned across the piano. Carstairs, on the stool, stared down, motionless, as the loose leaves of the music twisted, uninterrupted, to the floor.

In the corner, to which Bradbroke and Anne Netherby had followed Shirley Framleigh, Hazel Ellicombe, and Jem Fraser, hands went to ears, as if to shut out the sound.

Bradbroke had sprung up, white as the boy, Fraser, who glared with him into the shattered gloom. Chadwell had swung to Catherine's side, only to be thrust back as she sprang up fiercely, all her languor gone.

Only the big man and Marian Langmaid seemed impervious to the strange tension which had settled upon the room. And, as if he realized this, the American went to the piano, a panacea, the girl thought, in the long

strong lines of his body and the confident deliberateness with which he moved.

He bent over the silenced singer. "If you want, I'll go down to the street, and prevent any more interruption. Please sing again: you've got such a bully voice!"

But the white-faced singer said nothing. To the big man, he seemed to have petrified all in an instant; and Carstairs, who held the stool so immovable that it seemed a part of his rigid body, encouraged the impression. What was wrong — what was the trouble with all of them?

He turned to Lady Bam, but her set face told nothing. Then, to silent Lord Bam. The old man's eyes were sad.

The American turned back to the piano, and Paxton. "I'll give you a bass on that, if you'll let me," he said with a smile. "I've sung it a lot at home. It's one of my favourites. Come!" Leaning over Carstairs' lifeless shoulder, the big man struck the chord. "Now ——" He waited. . . .

And, from the street, mercilessly clear, though from far away now, came the voice again, this time in a crazy lilt, yet in a baritone which matched Paxton's tenor in quality:

"I wants to go 'ome to my country.
  This 'ole, it's no fit plaice for me.
I wants Grosvenor Square, Piccadilly,
  The Strand, the Embankment, the Sea.
I wants the fresh green o' old England,
  To rest there, an' never to roam.
My Gawd, I'm that 'omesick for England
  It *'urts* me! I wants to go *'ome!*"

Paxton's head went down. He caught himself, and staggered away from the piano. Carstairs followed him into the nearest darkness.

There was a fall.

"It's Miss Netherby," said some one. "Don't crowd up!"

And Catherine, with a shrill laugh, threw herself back into the chair from which she had risen. "I fancy you won't need my explanation now, my children," she jeered to Ormsby and the girl he had come back to. "For you see, that man in the street's told it: we stay on here because not one of us has the money to go home and live on. *We're exiles!* Lady Bam," she went on, in the same mocking tone, "your dinner's been exquisite. Now, Hugh, won't you ring for my rickshaw. I want to go 'ome *myself*."

CHAPTER III

SOUTH AFRICA

CONTRARY to all Marian's expectations, Anne joined her in the morning-room, just before breakfast, on the day following, with a smile.

"For it will be easier now, dear," she said. "I mean that one always relaxes after he's found out. Now that you know us, we shan't have to act a part with you, and you'll see our best side." She smiled, but her eyes held their look of weariness. "Try to imagine what it was to us, last night, when that man in the street began. Greg said, on the way home, that they ought to find the chap and make him a member of the 'Regent,' he's so one of them! Hard, hard — it's harder than hard, dear. But it was as hard to *act* our rôle as it was to have our pretence detected. You didn't — of course you couldn't — notice how those poor boys were trying. That song, which I hate even the name of, poor Brett always has to sing when visitors are about. We have to parade him as our one accomplishment; but it's rough on *him*. It's not his fault that he has those vocal chords and that, just before his father went under, Brett was completing a long course of study under the best teachers that money could inspire. That was before he had any idea of anything but life in nice, fit lodgings, somewhere about town, marrying some nice girl and, when the property came to him, go into the

big house. Poor Brett, it didn't work out that way: his father got the title, and a mania for investing. Everything went. Brett got five thousand out of the maelstrom, somehow, and came off here. He'd got engaged by that time and told the girl it wouldn't take him more than a year at most to quadruple the five thousand by investing here. That was five years ago, and Brett was sanguine. And *she* was — *then*. Well, Brett didn't make a go of it. His five thousand *went*, and he *stayed on* in South Africa. The girl got less and less sanguine, and finally married some one else. It was just as well Brett *didn't* marry her, though, for — what do you think? she actually had the hard-heartedness to send him a picture of herself and her 'oldest boy,' last year! Can you imagine any one doing that? And poor Brett down here, working and trying to forget!" Anne swung around sharply, with a bitter energy almost masculine. "You'd better take breakfast, Marian, if you want any." She led the way.

But, in the breakfast-room, she began again. She had been wan at the beginning, but now her eyes flashed and her soft cheeks flamed. "It was a wonderful picture. He showed us it. One of those geniuses of photographers! But he wasn't to blame: he didn't know what she was going to do with it. She was perfectly lovely, that girl was, and he'd taken her looking straight at you, the baby too. The boy was a cherub. And the way Brett mourned over them! He told me once that they didn't 'understand.' Evidently *she* didn't! And how could she have been expected to understand South Africa, any more than we understood it ourselves, before we came out here," she

laughed with unreserved bitterness. "Not precisely, for we *did* come! But, about Brett and the girl and the picture: I'm only trying to let you in, so that you'll be nice to him and make a lot of the picture, when he shows it to you, as he will. And Brett's only one instance of why a good chap comes out here and *stays*. Hugh Chadwell's the same way: nice regiment. You see the way he carries himself. Then something wrong with the business his father got his money from. The girl Hugh left is still waiting, so he's better off than Brett is, though not a great deal, for of course both of 'em know by this time that nothing can ever come of it. Carstairs, too. Prospects: A girl! Bankruptcy! *South Africa!* Jem Fraser got it younger than they did, and he's some hope left. We know that, for he's indigo blue half the time. And Greg ——" She stopped, breathed, then went on: "I might just as well go through the list: you don't know, and you can't, and I'm glad of it, too, what it is to be engaged to the dearest lad in the world and yet neither of you see the least prospect in the world of your ever marrying."

"But, dearest," the younger girl interrupted, tenderly, "I thought it was to be six months after the engagement was announced?"

"It *is*," came the hysterically laughed answer; "but, don't you see we don't know when it ever can be *announced*." The laugh broke, then began again, bringing Marian's arm about Anne's neck. "Don't you see *now*? Don't, Marian, don't kiss me, for I'll break down, if you do, and I've got to talk! Don't you see, Greg's working his heart out at the consulate? It makes me cry, he comes back so done. If he had money, even a fraction

of what Mr. Osmsby has, for example, he'd speculate, and make just as much as Mr. Ormsby does. But, as it is ——" Her voice caught, for a moment, then she went on: "He expected — we all did — that his uncle would leave him his money; but the uncle died and nothing came of it; poor Greg!" She caught her face in her hands, as if trying to force her grief back. "I'm going to cry anyway, and I shall be a fright now, all the rest of the day."

"Anne, Anne, dearest, don't ——"

"Oh, I know it's wrong of me to tell you all this. Rotten bad hospitality, Greg would tell me, if he knew, and he'd be right. Poor, dear boy, it's not his fault he's as poor as I am, and can't make money any faster than dad can! Why, when we were there, you remember, Marian, how it was, in Kent? You know how we lived, what we had . . . ? Greg's family, and dad's? You remember how it was then, how we talked of all that was to be? Greg was going into the Guards. God meant him for a soldier. What a one he'd made! What a soldier he did make, though it could be only against these horrible natives and mussy Boers! Then the crash came; something about some properties Greg's father and dad were both in; and Greg's father died, and Greg sold out what little was left; and, when father came out here to South Africa, Greg came along. I'm not sparing us, Marian, and I own I'm telling you now not so much for the sake of showing you how we all failed here, as for your sympathy. There's not a girl out here I can talk to about home, the home *we* had. They're — well, just as you see them, a great deal braver than I am; but they never knew us at home, never saw us as we *were*. Not that we're

not about all alike. I don't mean that: we *are;* but ——" She made a gesture with her hands.

Marian held her close. "Don't, dearie! And don't tell me any more; anyway, not now."

"If you'll let me, I'd rather go through with it, though I'm making it very hard for you, Marian, and I know what it is to receive confidences that hurt."

"Only because I feel so powerless to help you," the girl said, with touching earnestness. "If you want, Anne, tell me the rest, though I wish you'd not."

"There's not so much more. But this next will sound very vulgar and not nice to you, for you're just out from home, and, what's more even than that, you can't fancy what it is not to have loads of money. But, when we got here mamma, and dad, and Greg, and I — I tried to deceive people: we were 'tourists,' you know. It was, 'What a delightful country you have here! So odd and interesting, such a change from England. Stay-at-homes are *so* provincial!' I told these girls of our place, back in Kent, of our dogs and horses, this and that, everything. And they were quite snippy, and didn't ask us about much, no, not even here, in this dirty, disgusting, little place. Greg would come back from his work at the consulate, and tell how the chaps there made up their tennis parties and cricket and hunting, and left him out, just as their fathers left dad out, and their mothers and sisters left out mamma and me.

"For a bit, we didn't mind it — rather liked it. Then it got monotonous. No, that's not the word, but you know what I mean. People have to know some one, even here in South Africa. And I began to unbend a bit, told them

we weren't 'going home quite so soon as we'd thought to.' We 'liked Durban.' But, if we thought that would mollify them, we were mistaken, for their tennis and cricket and races and dinners and hunting and club theatricals went on without us, just the same.

"Then, one afternoon, Catherine Hetheridge came to call on me. You've seen her, and can fancy how she looked. I imagine she used to be very handsome. The men must have swarmed after her! She sat down, and said, in that odd way of hers, just as if she didn't care at all, anyway, 'Be honest, why don't you? Own up you're way down on your luck, and have come here to make money enough to live on at home. Oh, I know perfectly. And,' as I gasped and tried to freeze her, 'don't bother so much telling us of that big place in Kent. It'll be there when you go back; and, if the horses and dogs are a bit old, by then, you can get others. I tell you *I* know how it is. We all do: all of us, out here, had places once — at home; and do you fancy that any of us thought we'd be two years out of England, when we came here?' She threw back her head and laughed; and the worst of it was, she did it perfectly openly, with a bald naturalness that would have been fine, following anything else in this world. Then, her lips straightened again: she came on with: 'So, I say, be honest about it. Come in with us: you might as well now as later. You'll do it anyway. Of course, you've seen this place and know what it will be like; but we do things to make the time pass. And you can help us.' She looked me over with maddening coolness. 'We can use you and your looks in the club theatricals, probably.' Marian, I could have killed her for

that 'probably.' But instead — I did just what you've fancied: I went into the club theatricals. So did Greg — he showed he could teach them all, from the start — and into the other clubs. The fees are nothing. All the men in them know none of the other men could come in, otherwise; they couldn't come in *themselves*. And mamma and dad went in. It was the only way. We made the best of it. And now," Anne said quietly, though her hands clenched, "we're still making the best of it. Write you? How could I write you anything except what should make you think that I was mad over South Africa? I know. But I say again, in my place *you'd have done the same*."

At the close of the unhappy story, the young girl's eyes remained downcast. Something — not their difference in years — had made her show the greater emotion at Anne's confession. Something? South Africa! And its influence went deep, for Anne's eyes were dry; no tremor shook her whitened face. Marian's cheeks were wet with tears. For the confession had been too sharp and sudden. Not even the revelation, at the Regent Club, had prepared her for this; not even Catherine's crude directness had led her to expect such an attitude on the part of *Anne*.

"How long must it last?" she asked slowly. "I mean this — exile?"

Anne shook her head wearily. "We've stopped asking each other. All we know is that nineteen out of every twenty people who come here, as we did, live out the rest of their lives in South Africa. That's our only prospect and we're facing it. What else is there for us? Dad's making only the shamefulest little; mamma's fast get-

ting an invalid from sheer homesickness and sorrow; and Greg, poor lad, is advanced only the smallest bit every year, just nothing to match his own needs, to say nothing of his and mine. Why" — her voice, naturally low and sweet, came almost harshly — "leaving out our ever getting to England, there's not the vaguest prospect of our ever marrying *even here in South Africa!* We're all alike, as Catherine Hetheridge told me, that day: Greg's like Chadwell and Fraser and Paxton and Hilary Carstairs; and I'm like the other girls, those here and those still waiting in England, the girls that were left behind."

In her chair, which faced the breakfast neither had thought of, Anne leaned back. Not even South Africa had given her power to endure her own terrible avowal. Or, perhaps, it was that in all her sad thinking, she had never before chanced on such an accurate statement of her hopelessness. Her head, with its beautiful, soft hair, which, for its duskiness, Marian so envied, went down into her hands. "I can't stand it! I can't take it as the rest do! I can't! I can't! *Sometimes,*" and her breathing was pitiable, "I feel that *I don't care how the money's got, so long as Greg gets enough of it for us to marry and go home.*"

"Anne, Anne," a voice said. Unnoticed, Greg had come in.

She ran to him, in a convulsion of feeling so abandoned that the girl, whom she had forgotten, knew not what to do. "Greg," Anne cried, as she clung to him, "why did we go there last night? Why did that man in the street sing to set his words haunting me? Greg, Greg, marry me, and take me *home!*"

CHAPTER IV

STRANDED

WHEN Greg walked down the drive to the street, an hour later, he wondered at the effective malice of the fate which had so suddenly and so marvellously sharpened his sensibilities and multiplied his objectivity to suffering. Or was it, he wondered, only that he was realizing his fate better now? Yes, it was that. How blind and weak he had been — though those disabilities had been a kindness — not to see himself this way before! For nothing new had come to undeceive him; nothing faced him now which had not faced him before, it seemed for centuries. Even Anne's hysterical weeping, her wild despair, her relinquishment of even the shallow pretence of hope with which they had tried to deceive themselves, though so fresh and terrible to him, formed no revelation. Always — it seemed from the very instant of their arrival — he and Anne had known that they were stranded forever in South Africa! The folly of thinking that from such a centre they could work out their return! They had simply crippled themselves. They had selected the last, instead of the first, of all corners of the world. With better hope of success, they could have gone north, south, east or west, yes, better have stayed in England itself. *Any* land would have been surer of yielding the delivering

dollar than South Africa! So, why, he asked himself over and over, should his brain now seem bursting, since he had known all this before? Why should he involuntarily hold out his hands, as he walked, as if suddenly he were a child again, and walking were an experiment of the result of which he felt not quite sure? It bothered him and unnerved him still further, that he should see himself so instantly inadequate. He put his hand to his head, as if to aid, by that means, the essential solution of this riddle which had sprung on him. What was the matter with him? What had happened? Was he mad? Were they all mad? Every one? What else could it be? That or the whole world had turned upside down under some cataclysm of nature, as utter as would be required to restore what had so astoundingly gone, leaving him, a half-hobbled fool, feet bound and wits wandering!

Quite at a loss, and by now trembling from his self-discovery, he stopped, and looked back, as if he half-expected to see people following him. But there was no one. He stood uncertain, for a long moment. The best thing for him would be to go back to the Netherbys', providing he could last that far, for Anne and Lady Netherby would manage. He meant take care of him. But he shook his head: he could not endure the sight of Anne's grief. It had killed him to see her crying and not have the means of comforting. Yes, that was it — he was a failure: he couldn't comfort her, he detailed to himself, shaking his head again, and swaying, and beginning to look about warily. Then, too, if he returned to the Netherbys' he would be pretty sure to see Miss Langmaid. She had said something to him as he went out.

He wasn't sure what. It wasn't very clear to him. Nothing was very clear, except the suddenly realized fact of his utter powerlessness. But he thought — and became sure of it, as he revolved it laboriously in his mind — that she had said something which she meant to be comforting. Her eyes had looked that way: she was young, he reflected, with a perspicacity of which he was conscious, and she had let her sympathy come out. She had been sorry for Anne and perhaps even for him. She knew, now, just how it was with them. Why, yes, of course, she knew, for she'd been at the club last night — could it have been only last night? — and heard that man in the street singing! Then, with the terrific suddenness and clarity with which all of his conclusions had all at once begun to come to him, he knew what his trouble was: because he hadn't any money and couldn't earn any, he and Anne couldn't marry and go home and forget, for all time, that they'd ever known South Africa. That was what Anne had just told him, what he'd heard her telling Miss Langmaid, there in the breakfast-room, as he came in. She'd said she couldn't stand it any longer; it had gotten so now she didn't care how he got the money if it would let them marry and go back to England. And she was right. Anne was right! That was the way he felt *himself*. *He* didn't care how he got this money any more than *she* did. And now he *had* to manage it, for Anne couldn't stand it any longer, any more than he could himself!

Standing quite still, in the glittering sunlight, he nodded to himself, with the safe air of a man who had emerged from an enshrouding mystery which had been puzzling

him, and now saw his next step clear. How simple it was, now that he saw it! He was not thinking yet of the means: he was reflecting only on the profound and inevitable infallability of the decision upon which he had come so suddenly: *He'd get the money somehow.* He turned quickly, and began to walk on. What a tangle he'd been in, back there! He shook his head and even shrugged his shoulders a little. He'd been pretty near going *amanzi isi-quekweni* — that is to say, having his brain tip — then he smiled, amazed that he should have recalled the Zulu idiom at such a moment, even to the *click* in the "q." Yes, it was amazing. But he put his achievement aside modestly, in order the better to dwell on the close shave he'd had and how his sensations, before he had gained his present, unassailable sanity, had alarmed him. Well, the danger was past now! Now, all was clear-sailing! He felt unaccountably free and unrestrained, a liberty he hadn't experienced for he didn't know how long. And he drew a deep breath, and swung along with a springy stride.

As he did so, he saw, to his surprise, that he had descended into the lowest parts of the city, in his reverie. He knew the place — that is, he had heard of it — he was off behind Berea Road, where white men and native women lived and died in unspeakable familiarity and even equality. Pine Street was no sanctuary; that was where the coolies and Kaffirs lived, they and the Arabs, the Sulimen. But *this* —— Catching the direction which gave the earliest exit from these degraded and criminal — how under heaven had *he* gotten down there? — he walked still more swiftly, stepping over, and working his way, outraged, through group after group of children of every

shade, some mature enough to offer him insult, and others so small as hardly to be aware of him, engrossed as they were in moulding, from clay, dolls portraying, with shocking candour, the human form. Young and old — what beasts these creatures were! The Government ought to prevent it. Gad! He heaved a long sigh as he emerged into Berea Road, from there, came out upon Essenwood Road, passed the Government Buildings, "Kings' House," and faced off for the club.

He felt almost a thrill of pleasure as he approached it: the morning was fine, and the officers, who were human enough at times, to distinguish the difference between the military and the laymen, would be at the race track at the foot of Berea Hill, off on Stamford Hill Road. They'd be out of the way. They were good chaps, and probably didn't bet any more than they could afford. Not even in the sudden, lofty point of view which was now his, did he hold them less highly for betting. The sin was not in betting. It was in not having money with which to bet. But he'd remedy that. He'd get the money!

He walked fast again. He hoped Chadwell and Carstairs and Paxton and Jem Fraser would be at the club as usual: he wanted to tell them about his discovery that he was going to get the money somehow. By a course of reasoning so devious that even he could hardly follow it, Greg had reached the conviction that his secret was not his alone, his discovery not his to monopolize. It was not only that Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs and Fraser were all in the same boat, needed money as badly, almost, as he did; it went deeper than that. So he'd tell them about his decision. And he wouldn't wait!

Looking ahead, he saw a man glance at him once, then cross the street. Greg recognized him: it was Willouby, the superintendent of the new company that had just taken over the Crown Deep Mine. Disinterestedly, Greg remembered going to him and asking to be kept in mind for a position; and Willouby, who had seemed a very decent chap for one so exaggeratedly lucky, had promised to do anything he could and let him know next time he saw him, just as he'd promised Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs and Fraser, when *they'd* applied. Well, Willouby had seen him — and had crossed the street. It was a decent way of letting him know there was nothing for him to hope for with the new company. Probably, Willouby'd crossed the street from Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs and Fraser the same way. They'd kept him busy dodging. Gad! they'd coursed him like a hare! That didn't matter either. They'd be at the club — having regard to the nicety of his new power to calculate all things unerringly, Greg established their presence with the inevitableness of Destiny — and he'd tell them about Willouby and *then* — well, he'd something *real* to tell them: *that he was going to get the money anyway.*

He entered the club. He was right: They were there, all four of them, sitting in silence, as if expecting him. Ormsby was there, too. Greg had not included this in his calculation, and, for a moment, he forgot that the big American was his guest, put up, by him, at the club.

"Confound the chap," Greg reflected, as he recognized the long, broad, flat back he generally admired so. "Any one'd fancy he'd have realized how in the way he'd be!"

"How de do, Ormsby?" he said aloud, with the best

counterfeit of his usual manner he could manage. Never mind: he'd go out soon! But how confoundedly big the man was: looked even more fit in white drill than he had, last night, in his evening clothes! Some men had everything!

Then, another error in his calculation revealed itself: Colonel Hackluytt, an old and, for his long years of effective service, a privileged member of the Regent, came in, looked frankly about him, corrected his white moustache and imperial, smiled at the preoccupation of five of the six younger men, and sat slowly down.

"One drink, all 'round," he said, and smiled again.

The silence deepened: the five knew — a story was coming. Was a man ever so obtuse?

"Right O! Colonel," encouraged Greg and Carstairs with an earnestness which recalled their repeated hits in the club theatricals.

With unimpaired geniality, the old warrior summoned a waiter. "One all 'round," he laughed. Clearly, he was good for an hour at the shortest, and Greg could have groaned aloud. But he said, "You know what, sir." And Paxton and Chadwell and young Jem Fraser echoed from the corner they'd retreated to. "Right O!" following a "Fine for you, sir," from the big American.

"Chuck it out, the confounded thing, but crush it first," came sharply from Chadwell. "Teach these beggars a lesson! You're nearest, Greg." And Bradbroke leaned, lithely, toward a small, earthenware cup of native workmanship, which a dark hand had suddenly thrust in through the open door.

But before Greg's upraised stick could obey Chadwell's

monition, Colonel Hackluytt, youthfully active, caught the cup. "Pardon me, my boy, but I've a better way," he said. And he stuffed a silver piece and a larger, of copper, into the little cup, then restored it to its owner, and slowly closed the door. "I know," he said, as he turned back to them, "it's only a witch-doctor, only a Zulu beggar; but," as he seated himself again, "it's been some little time, now, since I've willingly done anything that could get those chaps down on me." He fixed himself solidly in his rattan chair, without a glance at the men about him. When the glasses were brought, he bowed, and after the short toast, touched his to his lips, then lowered it, setting it carefully, almost painstakingly, on the little table which the waiter had placed near. Then, raising his strong old eyes, he said slowly, "I'm going to tell you young chaps now why I'm so careful, not to get a witch-doctor's enmity. 'What's the difference?' you're thinking, 'for they're only niggers? Witch-doctors? Natal's full of 'em. They're always running about, coming in on a man, and all he ever does is to have his "boy" give 'em the right-about!' Yes, but when a man's lived on the veldt, when he's seen these witch-men weave their influence ——" He stopped, as if the current of his recollections had suddenly set so strongly that speech was impossible. He nodded, as if to himself. "Yes," he said deliberately, "and, after I've told you, *you'll know.*" With the unhurried manner of a soldier of severest service, with the self-belief in the supernatural which characterizes the old officer of generation-long experience in South Africa, he spoke to himself, as the old-timer always speaks. He *was* an old-timer. He had stood still,

with the code and memories, taught him unforgettably, by the soulless, never-embodied Spirit of the Veldt. That was why Hackluytt stood still; that was why he remembered that lesson so eternally; that was why he held to his old point-of-view, his old ways. For one of them, he continued to smoke — and was always urging men to try — Boer tobacco, "McHollisburg Range." "I like it," he would say, "for it's strong and loose and dry." For another, his drink was always Boer brandy, "Cape Smoke," in the English idiom; "dop," in the language of the Boers. Yes, Hackluytt clung to his "Cape Smoke"; "it's like the best whiskey you ever drank." he would say, "with just a little taste of raisins in it: it's so sweet." And, sitting there, firm and straight in his chair, for all his snow-white moustache and imperial, he looked about him, covering each of the six faces confidently. Still muzzled by the tide of his code and his memories, he sat silent. Then, he raised his glass once again to his lips and, having again tended his moustache and imperial, he began.

CHAPTER V

THOKOLOSI, THE EVIL ONE, THE POISONER

I SHALL give it exactly as it was," he said gravely, "even to my own share in it. And I give it here, with truth in its every detail, so that those of you who have never been so far south before, or, having been here even to the point of residence, have not learned, shall know something of what lies in wait beneath the apparently prosaic surface of South Africa. That, then, is my own excuse and my story's prologue. The story itself is this." He waited, leaned slightly forward, and the story came:

"The 'Corinthian,' as everybody knows, stands well back in Piccadilly, and the centre-pole which holds up its roof is, or rather was, Sir Gordon Ralfe. There is neither time nor occasion here to go into the reasons which led him to cease his patronage of the ring and track, and become our first and most radical scientist. Suffice it to say that, at the time with which I deal, he had not for years had on the gloves, and had got too heavy for the jumps, weighed down, it may be, by his honorary degrees from admiring American, as well as European and English, universities. He continued, however, to be the keystone of the 'Corinthian,' and might have been,

even to this time, had not the strange incident of which I am about to speak occurred:

"I had found the usual crowd there, that night: Stemming, of the Ministry, in between the acts, Keith Teilston, Captain Wainwright, unconscious of his immediately impending colonelcy; Fraser Bell, Sir Henry Carrisbrook, half a dozen 'retired,' and as many or more 'actives,' of the line, Lee Stronnock, Brice-Bellingham, and young Roger Bam. Sir Gordon was absent; and this was, in itself, so out of the ordinary that I spoke of it to Carrisbrook, learning then, for the first time, of the sudden disappearance, a fortnight before, of Sir Gordon's only son, a disappearance the more unaccountable from the singularly gentle and home-loving nature of the boy. All of us had known him, and recalled his rather ascetic temperament, his diminutive figure, which went so oddly with his father's bulk and his own nineteen years, his almost gypsy skin, and his great black eyes, so passionless and yet so receptive of impression, their spirit always received from others, and never from within. A good bit of a dreamer, we had thought him. He had never known his mother; and, though idolized by his father, who had married late in life, had been, it was said, very fairly much alone.

" 'And you say he left nothing to tell where he was going?' I asked Teilston, who had joined us, full of what I found still to be the one subject tolerated at the club.

" 'No, he left nothing! Not a syllable!'

" 'Or any kind of a lead to follow,' struck in Carrisbrook, 'I believe there were the imprints of the bare

feet of a child, leading from the house to the highroad, through the mud — it had rained heavily in the night; but there they left off suddenly. Imagine it! And this in England!' He shook his head.

"I was not less incredulous, and should have asked more, had not Stronnock, at that moment, interrupted us.

" 'I say, Hackluytt," he called across to me, 'just take a look at this picture. Rather good,' he resumed, as I went to him: 'something they've put up since we've been here!' Then, lowering his voice, 'If you've nothing on, meet me, in half an hour, in the third smoking-room!' And he strolled off, leaving me before the picture which had attracted him.

"As he'd said, it had been hung since he and I had last been at the 'Corinthian'; and there had been ample time, for we were just up from Natal, where we'd been in the legation for the past four years. It was good to be home again; but, though England's England, and London's the best of it, I was already longing for the up-country and the veldt; and Stronnock's swift aside, smacking somehow of 30 degrees south, came gratefully. And I was glad when the half hour was up, and I could turn the knob in the door of the third smoking-room.

"And there, with Stronnock, I found Sir Gordon Ralfe. His eyes met mine, as I entered; but he gave me only the most formal bow. I fancy he barely recognized me. I know that his emotion left him scarcely recognizable.

" 'I've asked Hackluytt to come into this with me,' Lee explained briefly. 'You were saying,' he resumed,

'that your men have found no trace of him. Why have you not called in Scotland Yard?'

"Sir Gordon turned on us: 'Because they would think me mad, if I told them what I shall tell you: the cursed obsession, the damnable doggrel, which came on me the night he left, and now is crazing me! I cannot pronounce it, but'— as Stronnock pushed ink and paper toward him, 'yes, it may be that I can *write* it down.'

"With laboured effort, he did so, then bent over it fascinatedly: 'What do you make of it?' he demanded. 'Translate the hellish thing, if you can, for God's sake, and tell me what it is, and how I came by it, and what, if anything, it has to do with Esmonde and me!'

"For one speechless second, Stronnock and I looked down at what he had written, then we sent our eyes away from each other. Indeed, I believe that it was only to give us time to adjust ourselves, that Lee rang for wine and fresh cigars. And, when he spoke, it was to put a question:

" 'Did you come to me with this, Sir Gordon, because you knew of my familiarity with the native tongues and dialects of South Africa? If so, why did you fancy that this might be South African?'

"Sir Gordon looked absently about him, 'If I could express it,' he said dully, 'but it is too vague, too indefinite, too indefinable: only the remotest, most elusive of suggestions, yet with a reminder of South Africa,' he added, slowly, 'if of anything.'

" 'A reminder? Then you have been there?'

" 'It was six years ago. I went for scientific research. I was there, as I recall it, a little beyond a year.'

"'You went well accompanied?'

"'My son and I were the only white men. Of course, we had the usual guides, bearers, and interpreters. We went from Natal northward through Zululand into Swaziland, for the hunting; then up into Uganda to study the sleeping sickness, there so prevalent.'

"'And, from there?' Lee asked quietly.

"'We dropped downward, and passed through to Cape Colony, where I made an examination of the "blue" soil around Kimberley, before visiting Durban, then turning northwest again into the Orange River Colony.'

"'Crossing the Drackenbergs, after that?'

"'No; we went into Basutoland.'

"'To study the fossils, the Bushman cave-pictures in the Quthing, and the animal impressions at Tsikoani,' supplied Stronnock. 'They are remarkable.'

"'On the contrary,' corrected Sir Gordon, 'I went to observe the natives, to see if they were as described by my friend, Callamore, in his very interesting book!'

"Lee inclined his head. 'You found the Basutos distinctive, did you not? They are less perfectly built than the Zulus — and quite natural, too, for the latter are warriors, and the former tillers of the soil, yet they preserve more of their ancient powers. I wonder if, in your short time among them, you became aware of their use of telepathy?'

"The zeal of the investigator glowed for a moment, in Sir Gordon's eyes. 'You refer to their witch-doctors! Yes, they have mastered it. At first they were reticent; but, later, they displayed it frankly, so convincing me

that I placed my mind in the required receptive state and invited them to employ their skill on me.'

" 'And they did so?' Lee asked, his eyes on the slowly dying ash of his cigar.

" 'Repeatedly, upon *both* of us. Their communications through Esmonde were well-nigh incredible.'

" 'So that you became convinced that they could effect your will through distance?'

" 'Beyond all question. In Esmonde's case — but I shall not even attempt to describe it to you. They found him the better subject of the two.'

"Again Lee inclined his head. 'But,' he asked thoughtfully, 'were they not afraid that you would learn too much? It would have been expected for they are insanely jealous of their art.'

" ' That did not come until later,' replied Sir Gordon. 'I have said that one had to accept the strange fact of their mental influence. But even that was dwarfed by something I came on, unexpectedly: one day, one of my chief interpreters, whom I had had bribe his way into familiarity with some of their oldest men, told me that something had sprung out upon him from behind the juala pots in a witch-doctor's hut, and that, as a result, he had not an hour to live. The man looked in perfect condition, and I ordered him back to his work. But, as he turned to obey me, he fell dead at my very feet. I had put no faith in his story, and still did not; but, out of curiosity, I looked behind the juala pots he had said the Thing came from; *and, there in the dust, were the imprints of diminutive human feet.* You will hardly accept it, yet I affirm it, and you have already visualized my next

step: I taxed the witch-doctors with the crime, telling them that, though I should leave their punishing to the proper authorities, I regarded their mysterious agent as only a clever bit of trickery, which I held it my duty to expose. And ——'

" 'Yes,' Lee's voice came, almost impatiently. 'And they?'

" 'Turned sullen, sullen as bated dogs, and told me I had best desist. I redoubled my efforts, I omitted nothing. And I believe, still, that I should have solved the riddle, had not Esmonde begun to give me anxiety. He had maintained friendly relations with the witch-doctors, and had become so rare a telepathic subject that he was sensitive to their lightest wish; and this seemed to prey on him — he was not, he never has been, strong,' Sir Gordon said grudgingly; 'and I abandoned my study and brought him home to a more natural atmosphere where there were no witch-doctors to dominate him with their powers.' His eyes fired, his breast heaved, 'I took him from them. I ——'

" 'You should have done that before,' said Stronnock unwillingly. As he spoke, he turned toward Sir Gordon the small square of paper, hardly dry from the pen. '*Thokolosi, ha-e-na a bolkue,* is what you have written. The last three words mean, "Come down and help us," and the language,' Lee completed slowly, 'is that of the people of Basutoland.'

" 'And the first word, "Thokolosi."' At last Sir Gordon had caught the drift of Stronnock's questioning, and his hoarse whisper barely reached our ears

" 'That is the secret which they were afraid you might

find out: the fact of the Thokolosi, the strange, small, unclassified people whom the witch-doctors call in to aid them in their most unhallowed work. I wish to God I could construe this otherwise, but it has only one meaning: *six years ago, your son came under the witch-doctors' influence; and this has lasted until now, from Basutoland, they have reincarnated him into one of those creatures whose existence you doubted, have summoned him for service, and he has — gone!*'"

Hackluytt bent his eyes on one after another of the men who stared at him, motionless. "I wish," he said gravely, "yes, I beg of the Almighty, that some day I may be permitted to forget the face turned toward us then by old Sir Gordon Ralfe! They say that Science is merciless; and in this case she was: in her behalf, he had sought to plumb the pit of native mystery, and, though he had not succeeded, it had left him without the balm of incredulity: he heard Stronnock's grim verdict and *believed.* For a time there was silence, so dead that I heard the weightless sounds of the invisible life around us, so faint as hardly to produce the idlest vibration upon the ear.

"'Yet one more question,' said Sir Gordon; and even his lifeless voice was a relief: 'how came I to receive a message, or a command, as you now call it, sent to my son and not to me?'

"'*Secondary reception,* which you learned from the witch-doctors without being aware of it,' said Lee.

"Then again silence, deeper even than before.

"At last, Stronnock swung toward him, 'You have heard. And now?'

"Aged suddenly by years, the other rose up. 'I am going to Basutoland, to him,' said old Sir Gordon Ralfe.

"But Lee's square hand went to the shrunken shoulder. 'No, for it would mean your death, and his. Besides,' and I nodded, as our eyes met, 'there's another way: *we will go in your stead!*'

"And that is why, a week later, we took passage on the Rennie liner *Inanda* for Natal.

"You know what the trip is," Hackluytt went on: "one never becomes used to it, run it as many times as he will. I say it, and I was old in South African things, even at that day! I say it, and truly. For who can tire of the Indian Ocean, who think to measure the tales of horror it has heard? I say to you that this cursed ocean ——" His hand set, but he caught himself back obstinately, with a resentful growl: "No matter. At last we swung into Durban Bay; the Government railway dropped us at Ladysmith, where we got our outfit of a dozen trusted 'boys'; then we were off, due west, across the Drackenbergs, across the southeast corner of the Orange River Colony, and, four days later, came out upon the border of Basutoland. And there another traveller overtook us with swift Madagascar oxen. It was Sir Gordon; on the day after we'd sailed, he had followed, at once taking passage on the *Castle Avondale.*

"At seeing him, regret and baffled anger showed in Stronnock's eyes.

" 'I told you what it would mean, if you came,' he cried out.

" 'But I have made my choice,' the old man said.

" 'Sir Gordon,' Lee said again, 'you cannot realize the

choice you've made: remember that the nGaka, the witch-doctors, summoned Esmonde because they hated you and wished to punish you; and your presence here will only assist their ends. Go back with your oxen, and let Hackluytt and me go on. We're immune to their influence, for they never caught *our* wills; and we'll take them by their necks, as we did another, back behind us at Natal, and they'll bare their souls to us, as that other did!'

" 'Yet I must go on,' said Sir Gordon, absently.

"A dog had trotted over to us from the bearers, no native cur, but one of our bulldogs, built like a Channel tug.

" 'From the coast, as part of your equipment?' asked Stronnock, as he stroked the great beast's breast.

" 'No, it was Esmonde's.'

" 'That,' said Lee thoughtfully, 'is well.' But he spoke half-heartedly, his eyes on the indefatigable distance dividing us from our quest.

"Not so Sir Gordon's: they had gone back over the long trek up-country from the coast, and from there to where England lay hidden well behind four oceans and eight thousand tortuous miles of fog and sea.

"Then he turned toward us. 'I am ready.'

"And at four that day we breasted the first rough hills of wild Basutoland.

"As you enter, from the Orange River Colony," Hackluytt resumed, with telling intimacy, "enormous rocks and kopjes face you, jutting up here and there. In the near distance, you see the Malutis, a spur of the Drackenbergs, looking toward the east, and, in between, the waving

plumes of the amabele, the vigorous Kaffir corn. Every now and then, as you proceed inward, you come on villages of conical, thatched huts, the cattle-kraal, in which is the local cemetery, invariably in the centre of the town. And, at each of these sprawling villages, we were greeted deferentially.

" 'May your feet go softly all your days,' or 'You have taken the wedge from between my teeth,' they told us, for, so far, the Basutos had shown us only friendliness.

"Then, as we passed farther in, their temper changed: there was no overt act of animosity; but it was harder to get oxen; corn was scarce; and we had the greatest difficulty in securing guides, which last Lee and I had considered it policy to employ, though both of us knew the country perfectly.

" From time to time we met 'raw' natives, come upon in former wanderings; and these received us with immature cordiality. But they left us as soon as they found our party's personnel, for we were now come to that part of the land which Sir Gordon had visited those six years back, and they remembered him.

"Then one of our Kaffirs sickened and died horribly. There was no wound or sign of local druggery; but *some* of the poor chap's symptoms were those of one bitten by the tsetse fly, and that, in itself, was singular, for the insect is never found south of Delagoa Bay. The witch-doctors had scented us. And we were soon to have a better demonstration: our oxen, this time, for in one night they died.

"Then, our 'boys,' reading the signs, took fright.

" 'Baas,' said big umZablodi, our ax-man, 'my brother

is sick in Zululand.'* And, do what we could, he left us. I doubt if he ever reached the hut on the umHlatizi's bank.

" 'The Moloi, umFundize,' said our driver, singing the term of extreme deference between his chattering teeth. And, with three others, he left us, in the night.

" 'I'd expected this,' said Stronnock, after the last had gone: 'they felt the witch-doctors long before we did, and their sticking on this far ought to get them the V.C. But not even they dared to come farther, for this, Sir Gordon,' indicating the ragged outline of the kraals we were approaching, 'is the fateful village in which all your troubles were begun; and here the nGaka will send their Thokolosi against you. They have waited six years to do it, and they will be waiting for you now.'

" 'How long would they have waited,' Sir Gordon asked wonderingly. 'Suppose that I had stayed on in England — had, I mean, not come?'

" 'You *had* to come. The witch-doctors had *willed* it,' Lee went on evenly. 'I have not told you this before, for it would have made you only more susceptible. But their control of you has been the hardest thing I have had to reckon with. I was testing it that night in London, when I asked you to let us go in your place; and, though your consenting showed me that their control of you was not yet perfected, I knew that it *would* be.

* I see that I have used the words Kaffir and Zulu interchangeably, and this is error: the Kaffirs come from Kaffiria, down around the Cape, and are, I believe, half Hottentot and half Pondo. Whereas, the Zulus are a distinct and different race, vastly superior to the Kaffirs, will not marry into them, and, in fact, hold them to be beneath contempt. THE AUTHOR.

In short, I counted on your overtaking us about where you did.'

"Though Sir Gordon gave no sign, it brought home to him, for the first time, the palpability of the force with which we had to deal.

" 'Yes,' he said slowly, 'I see it now: they were calling me, as they had already called Esmonde; and I would not be warned. Well, I have obeyed them and they can do their will on me, for I don't want life, with Esmonde worse than dead. Yet,' with something of his old spirit, which we had missed so, 'it does come ill to me that I should have made their victory so complete! If they could have been overcome — if it were not yet too late ——!'

"Lee turned on him. 'It is not yet too late,' he cried out: 'we'll turn back now, and, *if you'll keep close to us and not for one moment leave us until we release you, before God, we'll bring you safe out to the coast in spite of all the witch-doctors that ever wore the iguana's skin!*' The temper of our mission had wearied even him; but now he was as a horse whose head is turned toward home; and it was good to hear the old, deep vibrance in his voice again. '*Remember: close to us, and not for one moment be alone!*'

"We sprang, like hurrying thieves, to snatch up what we needed most, and of these only the most easily packed and portable, not speaking, frankly glad, and hot for the start down the back track. And then —— I can see now the white moonlight of the still Afric night, hear the *who-who* of the baboons, the unrest of the monkeys as they rattled in the leaves, the *whee* of the Bush-baby, the

lizard which pleads as a nursing child, all coming eerily to us from the surrounding, spirit-haunted wastes. And then another sound, long-drawn, plaintive, pitiable — a dog's sad howling-out of his distress.

" 'Fools that we were not to watch him,' Lee cried out; and his tense arm, pointing, told the tale, for there was Sir Gordon, walking slowly from us toward the Bush, his eyes staring straight before him at Something — God knows what he saw! And then we saw It come shuffling to him from the deepest shade, a strange, small figure, Its head moving oddly from side to side as it came; on at him, It came running, was ten yards away, then five; before we could reach him, our warning cry drowned in Sir Gordon's dull groan of despair, as the Thing sprang on him and struck the life from out his breast, at the crack of our Enfields shuffling back into the blackness of the Bush.

"And so it was," Hackluytt concluded, "that they worsted us. Whether Sir Gordon died from another cause than the thrust of that small hand, whether that *Thokolosi* were Esmonde, whether our shots sped true, are questions which must wait their answer on another day than this. We buried him there among the cold rocks of bleak Basutoland, and, with him, our one opinion as to whose hand had brought him down. Yet, calling it Esmonde's, he was guiltless, being only the actor of the will of some nGaka, some witch-doctor, who, remembering well, called, when he would, his unforgiven enemy, to set upon him the direst of all the dire spirits of this unhallowed land, Thokolosi, the Evil One, the Poisoner!"

There was absolute silence when Hackluytt finished.

Still, as if mummified, his hearers stared at him. And he himself, old-timer that he was, sat motionless, hypnotized equally by his bitterness and his terrible narrative. Told quietly and without emphasis, yet with an unstudied earnestness which sustained its dramatic properties to their very top, the story had held his hearers, and its spell was on them yet.

At last, he moved, pouring down, it seemed without a swallow, the rest of his glass of "Cape Smoke." And there was little triumph in his fierce, old eyes when he looked about him. Rather, he seemed regretful, for he tugged, almost self-reproachfully, at his white imperial.

"Nasty idea, ain't it!" he said ruefully. "Sorry; but the thing came up, in my memory, like a thunderstorm, and I couldn't make it an April shower." He smiled grimly. "No, by Gad! not an April shower! Try some of my tobacco," he said suddenly to Ormsby, holding his pouch out. "I'd be glad to have you knock out what you've got in there now, and try mine, before I go along."

"Mighty glad to," said the big man, "and I'll walk along with you." He nodded to the other men, held the door open for Colonel Hackluytt, and the two passed out through the main living-room, and on into the street, leaving abruptly, a thing which men are always privileged to do — with *men*.

The door swung in and out lazily across the sill of the small, inner room which they had left, each swing more deliberate, like the stride of the pendulum of a clock, which, the instant before, has run down; then the door came to rest on a dead centre, a little off the sill, for the breeze blew strong. And the five men who watched it

seemed held from speech by its subsiding motion, and it was not until the motion died that Chadwell began:

"Pretty middling nasty rot, I say, if you ask *me!* And the old chap was right in feeling it was depressing, rot though it was."

"Mustn't blame him, though," Paxton joined in, "for it wasn't the story. We were that way already, heaven knows, and with cause enough!" He stopped short, and looked across to where Bradbroke stood by the window, apparently still hearing Hackluytt, his eyes aglow with sudden fire. "Greg, old chap," Paxton began, then stopped. "*You* give it to him, Hugh. You can break it a lot decenter than I!"

Chadwell nodded irresolutely but with resignation. "Anyway, I can get it out quicker." He turned toward the window. "Greg, you remember how all of us went to Willouby of the new Crown Deep Company, said it was the best look we'd any of us had since we'd got here, the only thing in sight that could possibly amount to anything? Well," without waiting Greg's answer, "it's all off. I saw Willouby just now on the street, and they're bringing their own men. We're *cooked.*"

There was a long silence through which they stared at Bradbroke, who, though he must have heard, had not turned.

Chadwell got to his feet. "I say, Greg, you know what it *means?*"

"Don't stand there like a——! Greg," Carstairs broke out, "can't you *see?*"

Fraser rose slowly and cautiously touched Paxton's sleeve.

"Try him, for God's sake, Brett! Hugh's messed it, somehow, and Greg doesn't — understand."

Then Bradbroke turned deliberately to them. "You're wrong, all of you. I get it. But let Willouby go. I've got something *real* to tell you."

For one breathless moment incredulity held them. The next — for he had he not always led them?— they pressed closely around him, noting his strange, wild gladness.

"Sit down!" he commanded with a swift glance at the door. And, when they obeyed him, he began, in a low, tense whisper, and with still glad and glowing eyes.

CHAPTER VI

STRANGERS TO SOUTH AFRICA

THE two men emerged from the club, the American filled his pipe and returned Hackluytt's pouch to him. "Thanks," he said, as he to light a match and draw the flame well to the tobacco, which he had crammed into the

Colonel watched him. "Have another match," ed, after a moment; "it's not fairly lighted. Odd, one of the best things about it, after its taste and th, is its being so easy fired. Fingers damp, ."

American's fingers were damp. But instead of g it, he used the second match, puffing until the of smoke hid his big-boned face. The truth of it or the first time in his life, Ormsby felt not wholly ease. And his next words showed it·

r story was terrible, Colonel. I take it you it to many."

many women, anyway. Sets 'em thinking all things! Would, I mean. That is, I fancy it Besides old-timers, and chaps with nerves I'm . I've never given it to a living soul, or ever will, you say, it's terrible. Of course, no matter how I swear it's truth, there're a stack won't believe

it. I don't mean you," he added hastily. "No, I don't mean you, sir. I can see you believe me. But, just as I said, there're some who'd only laugh." He shook his head resentfully, then guardedly studied the American. "You *do* believe it, don't you? I swear it's gospel truth!"

"You needn't swear to it, Colonel," said the big man, "though I don't know whether it's just because, or, in spite of, the fact I'm a stranger to South Africa. No matter which, I believe it, and it's a wonderful story. It'll be an amazing one to take home with me, when I go back."

"Good!" Hackluytt cried. "That's good. I'm glad you say that. By the way, when are you going? Hope not very soon. Like to have you along on here. Not a bad little city, y'know. Of course, I've been in South Africa so long I couldn't stand leaving it now. Nothing could cut me loose, sir! I tell you, after a man's been here the way I have —— Well, I've got so out of England I've got by wanting to go back. Didn't always feel so. These younger men ——! Then, too, they came down for a different reason than I did: I came down to fight — that was '79, mind!— and they came down to go back. But," with sudden feeling, "South Africa's no place for a woman — girl, I mean — unless her heart's here. You know what I mean: she's always looking home; and South Africa and England keep everlastingly far apart. Oh, I know; I've seen 'em. Bad enough for a man, 's I've said, when he's trying to see London from Durban; but for a girl ——?" He jerked his head once toward his left shoulder. "I've seen 'em, an' it's rotten bad seeing!"

He shot a hand toward a pile at the right. "You can always find me there, day or night, on the top floor, when I ain't at the club. Come in an' see me, sir. Glad to have you. And I'll have the tobacco ready, some of this, 'McHollisburg Range.' I like it, even if it *is* Boer stuff, for it's strong and loose and dry."

"I'll come and be glad to," the big man promised. Then he smiled quickly. For, just ahead of him, he saw another stranger to South Africa: Marian Langmaid had just emerged from a shop, and now was walking ahead of him up West Street.

Though she walked freely, almost rapidly — somehow, he had known she would walk that way — he at once overtook her.

"I've wanted to see you," he said frankly, not trying to hide the pleasure her presence gave him. "May I walk with you?"

"Yes," she said, with equal directness, allowing him to fall into step with her.

Though she had smiled, he saw that her face was very thoughtful. They were both very simple and honest about it, for she affected nothing, and he was unconscious of the significance of her letting him see that something troubled her.

For a moment he watched her profile. But admiration is not the deepest of the emotions, and he said quickly:

"I wish you'd tell me."

She looked up into eyes whose message would have been clear to her if she had been less in need of a strong man's strength. More than that, while another, and weaker, man would have urged, the big man waited. It

went well with the dependability of his big-boned face, and his wonderful vitality; and she came closer to him.

"Yes," she said, in a low voice, "there *is* something — Anne."

He schooled his features to hide his relief that her anxiety did not arise from herself.

"Miss Netherby." He inclined his head, as they turned, and walked on. "You mean last night? Yes, I know."

She corrected him with the frankness of youth or of mature acquaintance. "No, Mr. Ormsby, I don't mean that. At least, that's not all. I saw her this morning, and she —— Oh, it is too terrible!" Her gesture confessed her sense of impotency. "And I am so free. We, you and I, are. While Anne ——" The right word tarried, and she expressed it by sending out her slender hands.

He understood her — it was wonderful, how they understood each other: it was the rebellion of girlhood that girlhood should encounter pain.

"There must be something we can do for her! She can't be allowed —— She's very desperate! One can't think how long she's been fighting off such a surrender to self as this! You mustn't think she's not *brave!*" She looked up at him quickly, to search his face. "She's tried so hard. I'm sure any one — myself. Yes, indeed! For it's so unbearable, even when we can't begin to imagine the worst of it!" She meant that he must be quite sure of Anne's courage.

And again he caught her meaning at once. "Of course." He spoke as of a fact too familiar to require comment. "I saw that," he said, "at once."

She nodded, gratefully. "And I've been with her, of course, most of the morning. All of it, except when Mr. Bradbroke was there."

"That's good," he said quickly. "I'm glad he went. He's all right, Bradbroke. Wish they were married. But, anyway, they're *engaged.*"

He looked at her for corroboration, and was half-perturbed at her not turning. "It would be very different, if they weren't — I mean, if she had to stand this exile here, without him, *alone.*"

This time she did turn. "I don't know. I know that it ought to be. Last night, I felt just as you do now, and I was very glad for her. But, this morning, it seems to me that, instead of making it easier for her, Mr. Bradbroke is ——" She broke off abruptly.

"You don't mean," he burst out, "that Bradbroke's gone and acted like a cad? I'm sorry. I'd not once thought he'd be that sort. In fact, I took to him no end. I don't know," he appealed to her, "you strike so many men who seem unlucky, not meant for the rough and tumble. And, once you get thinking a man's that way, it doesn't make any difference how clever and brilliant he is, you ——" He shook his head, conscious of his failure to state it well. "I wish I could tell you just what I mean."

Unconsciously, he had verified her opinion, born in the first moment of their meeting, that he had this side. And she flashed at him a little glance of admiration which shook him. Perhaps, she was afraid of having made an admission, for she retreated instantly from the personal.

"Of course," she said, though, with a little, friendly

nod, "of course. But," going suddenly on again, "you mustn't think that Mr. Bradbroke — that he didn't — that he fell short. I didn't stay, of course, but, from what Anne said after he'd gone," she coloured suddenly — "he must have been very nice to her." She had turned altogether from him, and he looked straight ahead, away from her.

"I'm awfully glad," he said deliberately. "But," after a moment, "you said ——"

"I meant that their being engaged makes it harder, because they want so to be married, and it seems there's no chance of their ever doing it." She hesitated. "Anne says they can't even announce their engagement yet. That must be terrible." Again she looked precipitately away from him.

Then, because her little, sudden fits of shyness seemed to him the most utterly wonderful things he had ever seen, he laughed outright. "You poor little ——" He stiffened, and became, as suddenly, very grave indeed, very severe, even forbidding. "I was just thinking ——" What had he been thinking except of the happiness it would be to be the man — himself, of course — who would come to the aid of this shy-eyed girl at his side, in such a crisis as she had ascribed to Anne? He said to himself, "I must be very careful indeed." And he meant it, and would be, though his next thought was "I wish she'd turn this way again, for I've got her eyes now" — evidently, he had forgotten his identification of them on the preceding evening, and they had been puzzling him; "they're like English violets. She is herself: she's an English violet."

But she did not turn, and he went on, aloud: "Please, don't worry about them: they've got each other, and that's the whole thing, when all's said and done. They're hard up, just now; but what does that matter, what does anything matter, when they're got each other, when they're *engaged?*" He became aware that he was repeating himself again. Her profile, her gentleness, and her recurring shyness, and the curve of her cheek, and the blue of her eyes, made him repeat himself. He broke out again, trying to speak naturally in spite of the madness of his thoughts. "I mean every one's hard up, at one time or another. I've known a lot that way. My brother married one of the dearest girls in the world"—suddenly, he realized that he had never fully appreciated Tom's wife before; and he hurried on, loyally—"they were everlastingly hard up. Tom was writing. He's landed now, making all sorts of money. But he wasn't then, and they had some bad times. He had to look around for something else to live on, until the editors and publishers could see what good stuff he was doing. He had to write at night, and do something else by day. He got a berth in New York, as a settlement worker, at one hundred dollars a month. And Tom and Janet and the baby got along on that and what Tom took in from his stories. Tom hated social work, but he suffered trying to help those people and being held back by red-tape and a lot of other mechanical nonsense. And everything in him cried out for work which was world-wide different. Tom's heart was all in his writing, and he'd keep getting those inspirations of his, even while walking there in those dirty alleys, the people drinking and fighting,

the babies crying, and the whole thing one dissolute, diseased, sordid, wretched reek. I say, while he was working there, investigating a family, he'd think of something that was just what he wanted in one of his chapters, something about one of his book people; no, not that either, for his characters were real people to him, and they'd follow him like dogs about those howling streets; and he'd dash into a court or a doorway, and stick it down in his notebook, then go on again, trying to get a crazy woman or a madman into some sort of sanity and gentleness.

"It hurt him, that work did. I don't know whether I'm making it clear or not, but I'm trying. I say, his heart was in his writing. He was made and meant to write. Probably, his seeing that side of the world made him write better. He says so. But he got all he needed of it, yet couldn't get himself out of it, for the editors hadn't decided on him yet. He used to get discouraged almost, though never quite. He'd say to us:

" 'If only I could put all my time on writing ——' For his characters, his own people, those he'd created, haunted him, alluring, fascinating, almost dominating. They clung to him. But it had to be social work, and the slums and the shames and the shams of it! And Tom would rage, and Janet would comfort him. It's all years back, now, and Tom's one of the big ones, back there in America. But he and Janet did have hard times, just as Bradbroke and Miss Netherby are having now. And they got through them, just as these two will. Everybody gets hit, one way or another, Miss Langmaid. Have I tired you out, by running along so?"

She looked up at him this time. "Not at all," she said gratefully. "It's taken my mind off — I mean lifted it out of the drift it had gotten in. You've helped me, and I'm very thankful. Only," and she kept her eyes on him, "I hope that Anne and Mr. Bradbroke can stand it as well as your brother and his wife did. That's all I'm afraid of: something — I can't express it; but something makes me afraid. I don't understand South Africa."

His mood changed with hers. "Don't let anything frighten you," he urged gravely. "Don't be anxious about them. I'll tell you what: you see what you can do cheering up Miss Netherby, and I'll look out for Bradbroke. We'll manage something."

She was smiling again, for he was irresistibly enthusiastic and confident.

"Yes," she said, "we'll see what we can do for them. Are you going to be on in Durban a while, Mr. Ormsby? I hope so. Have you any idea," she asked, "what you can do with Mr. Bradbroke?"

He smiled, then laughed frankly. "I should say I have! This: I always have cracking good luck speculating — the market, you know; and never better even in Wall Street, back home, than right down here in Kimberley. I'm going to cultivate Bradbroke. Of course, I'm putting up with him, down here, and that's something for intimacy, but I'm going to bring him a lot closer, then get him investing." He laughed.

"But," she discouraged, "if he hasn't anything to invest —— Anne said ——"

He brushed aside her objection. "I don't care what

she said. I'll see to the money part, and get him investing, then control his investments, and, *before he knows it, he'll be hauling in money so fast that, even after he and Miss Netherby have married, he won't know what to do with it!* Stay on in Durban?" he demanded, his eyes shining. "I should rather think I am!"

She was staring at him, incredulously. "Do you mean that you think you can make Mr. Bradbroke make money, *enough* money?" Her hands had gone out. She was breathing uncertainly.

"That's just what I mean," he promised. "You'll see."

CHAPTER VII

STAYING ON

HE LEFT her at the gate, watched her turn swiftly up the long drive, was rewarded by a little unconscious, friendly wave of her hand as she turned the first bend and then swung behind the banking trees.

Simultaneously he faced off to his rooms or the club. He didn't care which; but, for some occult reason, decided on the former. He was wondering, marvelling. Then, deflecting his thoughts to Bradbroke, he asked himself again why men came to South Africa. And he did not once realize that it was such men as himself, or, rather, such extraordinary success as he had won there, which drew other men from the four corners of the globe to Kimberley. He did not realize that, in a way, he himself had boomed Kimberley, when he put in hundreds and drew out thousands, then put in those thousands and drew out millions in exchange for them. For a man of so rarely keen a mind, he was very simple and free from self-interest, so that he left himself wholly out of the riddle he was trying to solve. What he thought was:

"I'll stay on here and be near *her*." He seemed to be mixing his pronouns — at least the girl herself would have thought so. "I'll get a private line in, and watch Kimberley from here, that way; and I'll put this man

Bradbroke on his feet in spite of himself. Gad! it's not a bad thing I'm fixed as I am!" He was admitting that his luck might change — a thing he kept himself always prepared for; but he would tend to Bradbroke, whether it changed or not.

He was perfectly genuine and frankly happy about it. It was almost the first time in his life that he had congratulated himself on having won, before he was thirty, such an amazing stake in the world of finance. He could see it working out nicely: it could be nothing in the nature of a loan, to Bradbroke; much less a gift outright. He could not put the money in Bradbroke's hands until the moment when Greg, whetted into envy, had begun to come back to the game of investments and speculation, and would accept the tender as the most ordinary transfer in the world. Then, the casual suggestion that a little money placed *here, just here,* in Kimberley, would multiply itself to an unbeatable certainty. People said there was no such thing in any market. The big man laughed to himself contentedly. He'd tend to that for Bradbroke, as he had tended to it for himself, without one slip in the past eight years. He'd convince Bradbroke; and, once started, the young Englishman would leap toward the flood of gold. Then he'd need watching and controlling. The big man knew the game. And, after Bradbroke had won enough, he'd be "burnt" once, just enough to scare the life out of him; and Bradbroke would quit and stand pat: he'd be safe. The market would know him no more.

"It'll be sure as summer," said the big man to himself. "It can't go wrong!"

In the safe seclusion of the crowded streets, he smiled lazily. He was everlastingly glad he'd come to South Africa, which now meant Durban to him. He told himself that he liked the little dark city crouched there at the foot of the high veldt. He liked the people. He was going to help two of them. One of them, he would —— He did not smile, now. It was uncertain, *that* was. His face changed, for he knew that, if he lost her, the world would not hold one thing for him. He had forgotten the club, and was at the rooms, now, revolving the thought intimately.

Soon he rose to his feet and caught up his sun-topi.

"First, Bradbroke and Miss Netherby," he said to himself. He would start working at once, working for them. He meant for Her; but he did not say it. What he did say was utterly lacking in romance or sentiment:

"I wonder where I can find Bradbroke."

Greg would be at the club, he guessed, the next instant. He had suddenly gotten into the way of thinking of him as "Greg." The four would be there with him: Chadwell, Carstairs, Fraser, and that chap with the voice — Paxton. He'd go there.

He went, and found them, as he had felt he should.

They seemed much more collected now than when he'd left them an hour before and gone out with Hackluytt. Could that have been only an hour ago?

Yet, though more collected, they could not have been said to meet the big man halfway: They stared at him for a long moment in silence. Then they spoke indifferently. Finally, Chadwell suggested tennis. "If," he amended, "it were forty degrees under what it is in

the shade, if there *were* such a thing as shade." He seemed obstinately to doubt it, though he "*hoped* so; *somewhere*." Chadwell began, suddenly, to smoke hard. Fraser followed his example, a natural act: the youngest to follow the lead of the oldest man in the room. Paxton nodded vaguely. Carstairs said he felt "done. The heat, probably." It *was* hot; but the American, charged with all the dynamic force with which Catherine Hetheridge had taunted him so baldly, felt none of it.

Bradbroke seemed to read this. "I envy you," he said languidly. "Have a drink? Sorry." Then he relapsed into silence as the others had. And finally he shelved conversation by saying:

"Ormsby, you've come to the last place in town for decent treatment; but, really, old chap, we're not fit. I don't know what the rest of you chaps are off for, but I'm going to see if there's such a thing as cool water in the shower-bath."

"Never mind," said the big man good-naturedly, after Greg had taken leave of them. "Go ahead, the rest of you, and get cool, if you can." To himself he said as he went out: "After that thing, last night, the only wonder is they're not downright rude."

He meant their poverty and his money, and wished, for their sakes, that they thought him as bankrupt as themselves. Oh, well, he'd get them over thinking about that unequal distribution. That was another thing for him to do. And still another was: he'd make them forget that he now knew them as they were.

He turned up Berea Road, and strolled along through heat which seemed to shake the very street. It was one

hundred and twenty in the shade, if, as Chadwell had doubted, there *were* any such thing as shade. After a few moments of it, his pith helmet became penetrable: he might as well have been bareheaded: and he made for Greg's lodgings, filling his pipe with what remained of the Boer tobacco Hackluytt had given him. It was good tobacco. He decided to get some more of it, next time he went out. Happening on a tobacconist's at that instant, he reeled in and bought a pound.

As he emerged, he came face to face with Catherine Hetheridge.

"Yes," she said, "walk along with me. It's not far, and of course it wouldn't make any difference to you, anyway. I don't mean myself, but your energy. Why is that always taken as such an insult by Americans?" She addressed him as if she herself were a man, and her topic as disconnected with John Ormsby as the moon. "I've never known one of your countrymen to like it," she went on; "at least, they never seem to, and so I keep on asking until some one of you tells me why it stings."

"We don't take it as an insult," he said, speaking as idly as she did. "What we don't like is your implication, that work is all we're meant for."

She bowed with mock respect. "If you stay here long enough, I shall become educated," she began again, in her odd, absent way. "You're really instructive, and I believe you're genuine. Of course you're giving it to me so straight, every time we talk, is a pose with you, just as my way of talking is with me. But neither of us mind that. Don't feel flattered! I'm this way with every one! Besides, I know I'm going to marry my Jew, in the

end — and that'll *be* the end, for *me*. No joking! And you — I know that you ——" She waited the merest instant, then went on: "It's really quite romantic — is there such a word? I mean *now?*" Her finely drawn brows came together. "Well, you know what I mean, anyway! What was I saying? Oh, yes: that your coming away off out of civilization, down here, was romantic. Don't look so self-conscious: by 'you' I mean 'one,' not 'two.' I say, your coming off down here, with all your money and youth and strength and confidence, and meeting — such a riddle as we all present. Yes, present still, for, though you think, now, that you've found out all about us, you never know what any one of us is going to start on next. We don't know, *ourselves;* and, that's the one bracing thing about South Africa. Not that there aren't a lot of people who're happy here! For there are. A lot who've come, and seen, and — accepted it. I mean just our particularly congenial little set here, who've found they *can't* accept South Africa. Can't. Never can — and we've found that out. You find out a lot in South Africa! Take my own case: my mother brought me down here ten years ago. I don't know, to this day, what we came for; but there was a little money left; and I imagine I was to marry, then the three of us go back. We thought this land was gold and diamonds, and the men. Well, the money lasted my mother through eighteen months of incurable sickness, and unrelievable pain, at the best hospital at Cape Town. After it was all over, I got a berth, the one I'm holding still: I read to Madame Zelig. Get that? The combination? *Madame Zelig!* Every morning. She's a Jewess. I'm the first well-born

woman she's ever been able to buy, and she keeps our relationship quiet. You're the only one who knows of it, outside of ourselves, in Durban, or even South Africa! But, halfway through our first quarrel, he'll fling it at me. Who? Why, the son, Beaconsfield. *Beaconsfield Zelig.* Get that, too? How slowly your mind moves! Yes, of course: now you have it? He's the man I told you, last night, I'm going to marry — Madame Zelig's *son!*"

The American turned on her harshly. "Why don't you go home to England? I'll give you the money. Go home and get married! Go home anyway!" Suddenly, he hated Durban, Kimberley, South Africa — all of it. He hated it, and he'd take Marian Langmaid and Bradbroke and Anne Netherby out of it. His eyes blazed. "Go home!" he commanded the girl at his side. "Go back to England and marry some one! How much money will it take? I've got a lot of it."

It was not the almost insupportable heat which made her reel against him, then away so violently that he caught her wrist. She stared at him. Her lips moved.

But he would not listen. "You've no right to talk to a man that way," he broke out again. "You've no right to *feel* that way. Nothing's got a right to make *any* woman feel that way. It's this crazy country. Yes, that's it! But what it is doesn't matter. I've got more than enough to go 'round. I've got more than enough to pack every man and woman I've met here off to where he or she wants to go, and set them up there and let them live. And I'm going to do it. I thought you were all of you wrong about South Africa. But you're not wrong. You're right. It's *hell!*"

She had recovered herself. But her colour, the soft, even colour, which not even ten years of African sun had succeeded in bleaching, had left her; and she walked by his side without a word.

"Well, what do you say?" he broke out again. He was still full of rage at this Africa which could make a gentlewoman feel what this girl did. He *loathed* South Africa. More than that, it filled him with a vague, and, therefore, singularly intimate dread for the girl who had walked by his side so recently. He seemed to be seeing South Africa for the first time, and his dread mounted. Well, thank God, he was able to carry through what he'd just decided on! He was able, and he'd do it: *get them out of it!*

"Come," he went on, aloud; "I'll never see you again, and you'll never even hear of me, after you've gone back. What do you say?" he demanded impatiently.

She stopped. They had reached a gate which divided the sidewalk from the little drive, which led up to a trim, cement cottage. She stood, still mute, looking down at her slender slipper, and tracing its delicate contour with the end of her folded sunshade. And, when she lifted her eyes, he saw that they were very tired.

"I won't ask you in, though I might, for I live here, with my mother's maid. But, about that——" She hesitated. "They won't let you do it. I hope you stay here as long as she does. I hope it for her sake. For yours, I wish that you'd leave to-night. And, about me," she tried to smile, found that she could not, and gave up the attempt, with her old frankness, "I believe you. I believe you'd like doing what you said you would. I never expected to hear any one say anything like that.

I never hoped ——" She shut her lips hard. "I didn't think any man could feel like that. I've jeered all my life at America. Now, I'd like to see it. There must be something very fine, and strong, and chivalrous, and clean about it. But not even you can help me." Her eyes, of the colour of the blue soil of Kimberley, brimmed slowly over, and she watched him as if looking for the last time on something that she could not spare. Suddenly, her hand went out, taking his with a passionate strength. Then she turned and walked slowly up the path.

And, because he knew that she was right: that his money could not insure safety in South Africa for the girl his every thought dwelt on, and that her anxiety for Anne would hold her in the path of danger, the big man swung dully back into the street, which now seemed to quake and shiver like a melting-pot.

Subconsciously, he found his way back to the lodgings he shared with Greg. What was it — this dread which possessed him? In all his normal and vigorous life, he had not glimpsed the least even of its counterpart. He shook his head slowly. He could not solve it. He thought of Marian, her youth, her utter unconsciousness, her gentleness, her tender sympathy. Catherine Hetheridge had said: "For her sake, I hope that you stay here as long as she does. For your sake, I wish you'd leave to-night." What could she mean? What could his dread mean? He tried to scorn his dread away, to tell himself that it was merely a by-product of Hackluytt's terrible story, a foolish, nerve-born by-product, and that Catherine's words were hysteria. But he wired his agent, Falk, at Kimberley:

"*Don't expect me until you see me: I'm staying on.*"

CHAPTER VIII

THAT NIGHT AT THE REGENT

HE STAYED on. At first he was confident that, after two or three days, a week possibly, he and Greg should have resumed the old footing they had achieved on Greg's first visit to the shack at Kimberley. How informal it had been: the meeting, and the life they had taken up, as a result of it! A storm had driven the young Englishman into what the big man called his "estate," the quarter of an acre bit of wilderness on which he had stuck up the little, one-roomed, sheet-iron house where he lived, with his one servant, a Zulu boy, who worshipped the big man as a god.

It had been very simple and pleasant, there in the shack of sheet iron. Infernally hot, the American knew it would be, when the dry season came; but proportionately snug and dry through the wet. He had had his favourite books there; and had received his month-old magazines regularly; had smoked his pipe, written his letters, and, night and day, had tended his assault on Kimberley. He had come to South Africa on a vacation; and, stepping off the boat at the Cape, brown and brawny, had headed at once for the "fields." The first night at Kimberley he had slept four hours. He had slept three the second, and none the third. For the opportunities which lay open, before eyes like his, amazed and dazzled him, prom-

ising such returns as not even he had ever dreamed. So he had eliminated such a non-essential as sleep. He would make it up later. Just now, he was on a vacation, and must get things *moving!* He got things moving. After that, he made money as boxes are made in a box factory.

That was when Greg had "blown in." And they had taken potluck together.

The young Englishman had found the American interesting, first, from his ridiculous idea that service through the Boer war was no greater test than service for a similar period in the Philippines. At that stage of their association, Gregory Bradbroke had known nothing of the big man's singular grip on the market, and the wealth which grew in those clever hands. For there had been no indication of any superabundance of money in the pipe and the suit of white drill and the one-roomed shack of sheet iron.

Then, some one had told Bradbroke what the American was quietly doing to Kimberley, and it had nearly finished their acquaintance, then and there, for the Englishman, as far as success, or hope of success, in the "fields" went, was the American's antithesis.

But he could not hold out against the frank, good-fellowship of the big man, and, little by little, the two had done away with the barrier which the American's tremendous fortune had set up. Little by little, they had discovered admirable points in each other. Little by little, it had become natural for the younger man to camp with the other in the sheet-iron shack. And, from that hospitality, it had resulted naturally that Greg had soon asked the big man to visit him at Durban. It had come

about that way. And now the American was the Englishman's guest in Durban, put up at his clubs — the friend of his friends, the guest of a host whom he saw hardly once from dawn to dawn.

In any other situation, Ormsby would have known what to do. The sheet-iron shack waited him, back at Kimberley. But now, all he said was:

"Never mind." He meant, "Bradbroke'll get over it just as he did the same sort of thing at Kimberley." And again he was right: Greg came back to him saying frankly, "All sorts of sack-cloth and ashes! I've been a cad! Forgive me, and come over to the club and have a drink."

"That's the ticket," laughed the American. "As a matter of fact, you *have* been rather an unsociable owl. Now, that drink! Then, some smoke!"

It was ten o'clock, on a wonderful evening, the air cooled by the south wind; and, as the two swung down Berea Road, the big man told himself that their state was more normal than for many a long day. The old camaraderie of the life in the shack had come back again!

If Greg's satisfaction at the resumption were less close to the surface; if he were more reserved, it was less his fault than his temperament. At least, the big man did not measure him by what he showed. It was enough for him that the younger man's stride had recovered its bounding elasticity; that his voice had won back its resonant clarity which, when heard with his soft, crisp enunciation, made one take it for granted that Gregory Bradbroke sang. Yes, he was all right on the inside, and the big man smiled: he could get at *this* Bradbroke. This Greg he could help, and would help. The hour was

coming, when he could lift from Anne, and therefore from Marian, the now low-hanging cloud of Anne's despair.

The big man laughed as he thought of it. He knew that Greg, striding along beside him, probably took it as a reward for some preposterous, unheard sally. It was *all* perfectly preposterous. Never mind. He would do it! Nothing could stop him! Half a million and more swung into the hands of an hitherto inveterate loser, just as Standish had done, in the case of Pollard on Wall Street. By Gad, the thing was done *already!* Not even in his most fantastic dreams, had he dared to hope for such immediate success with Greg!

"I'll tell her, in the morning," he said to himself, as Greg swung in the door of the Regent Club, and they entered the living-room, to pass on from there into one of the smaller, private lounging-rooms. Paxton, Fraser, Chadwell, and Carstairs were there, Paxton humming something, at the piano. It was "Mandalay," again, and, this time, nothing trammelled the splendid voice.

"Good sand," said the big man, to himself. "Everlastingly good nerve!"

They nodded as he and Greg came in, though no one spoke until after the verse was done. And then it was only a quiet welcome, very friendly and cordial, which seemed to say: "Yes, we just won't say anything about it at all; but you know, old chap, that that bally ass *didn't* sing, that night, in the street. So you'll do as we have: just put it out of your memory."

Frank talk, then, of this and that, kept up comfortably for free and easy hours, over whiskey-and-sodas. Then, some good songs.

"Not much about, to-night," Carstairs smiled at last, with a lazy shake of his handsome head. "Jem, I say, got a match? You'll be in on the races, Ormsby, next month, of course?"

"I'll answer that," Greg said. "He'll not leave before. You remember, Ormsby, you as good as promised that."

The big man nodded. "Don't remember, but I'm content to leave it that I did."

"For, you see," Greg resumed, "you've got ——"

"What's that?" Chadwell broke in. "I thought —— Oh, I say, you chaps, this is too much!" He indicated a long, brown arm, which had crept through, between the swinging doors, a little, earthenware cup, waiting, upright, on its palm.

"Knock up the steward, or one of the 'boys,'" Fraser broke out. "Confounded imposition!"

"Right O," from Carstairs. "So, we'll sweeten his cup for him." Carstairs got up, with a burnt match loosening the ashes in his pipe.

But Paxton, the singer, stopped him: "Not much we won't *that* way!" He thrust back Chadwell and Carstairs, and clinked a coin into the cup.

His reward was unlooked for, for the door swung slowly inward, admitting the wildest figure in the world, a witch-doctor of the Zulus, the nGaka of the old, barbaric school. He wore a mutsha of reeds and a shirt. He had a bag at his waist, another at his neck, and a third and fourth on his shoulders, the bags he kept his "*devils*" in. He was not black, the American saw. He was the colour of chocolate with just enough cream in it to make it right

to drink. He was incredibly tall, self-scarred and marvellously thin. His purpose — to reveal some of the occult and unknown.

The Englishmen were familiar with such promises, for, as Hackluytt had said a fortnight earlier, witch-doctors were a commodity with which Durban was overrun. And the American, though less used to the class, had had long confabs with a Burmese fanatic, and delved among the wizards at Bombay. But this magician's procedure was new to him. The nGaka began at once, telling them of things they had lost and where the articles would be found, inviting verification by the sending out of messengers, which was done. He affirmed knowledge of the men themselves, and rehearsed it until, in one voice, they silenced him. Next, he distributed mental messages, which, though less clear to the big man than to some of the others, showed telepathic power to an almost inconceivable degree. Then, drawing a circle on the floor, the witch-doctor grew a basket from nothing, and, from the basket, a child, who presented the earthenware cup to receive their coins.

"Always the tax at the end," Fraser's laugh broke in. "Gad," with a look toward the stately magician, "you niggers never forget the most important part!"

"Not much," Carstairs followed. "Wish *I* could dig up a fake that worked as well. Don't give him much, you chaps: the beggar 'll haunt the club, if we do!"

At the words, the magician stepped back.

Bradbroke swung 'round. "Oh, I say, don't begin again. We've had all we can stand. Our acting so dazed was

for your benefit, Ormsby. The stunts he got off were only their regular menu!"

The big man smiled. "I must say you fellows pulled it off well. But," suddenly, "how under heaven did he know where I'd lost this jade seal?"

"Dirty beast sneaked it out of your rooms," Fraser accounted instantly, "just as he did our stuff out of ours, then *planted* it. After that, his 'finding' it was easy as A B C! They're very nice thieves!" He turned back to the nGaka. "Time you were off to your mud hut. What? Oh, I *say*," as the witch-doctor offered his earthenware cup again, "this *is* too much!" In an instant his foot had sent the cup to the ceiling in fragments, to fall, with a jingle of coins, to the floor.

In one bound, the magician had gained the doorway, his face a fury, his features alive with rage.

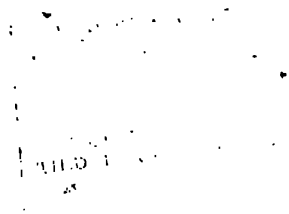
"The nGaka's curse on you!" he screamed, through their laughter.

"Curse and be damned, you gibbering fool!" Fraser cried. "The funny-house is where *you* belong! Curse away!"

For answer, the towering ghost in the doorway stiffened, then writhed toward them as a snake writhes, and, his long, emaciated fingers almost on the American, said:

"Death shall come fast to those who have earned the nGaka's curse. But you, umFundize, who have offended the least, shall be the last claimed. You will be the last to die," he repeated forebodingly, from the doorway, "of those now sitting within this room." Then, while they waited, wondering if they had indeed heard him, he melted into the blackness of the night.

"'*Death shall come fast to those who have earned the nGaka's curse*'"



For a moment they stared into the gloom, as if expecting his reincarnation; but the small, little used door, through which he had passed to the shadows, did not move. There was no sign of life or light or motion: only a small pyramid of dust, as if a mummy had been unrolled before them, then returned whence it had come.

"Death fast and soon" — the words came back in an haunting echo. Then, even the echo died. Silence, then — as of a world struck mute.

"That *is* a new one," said Carstairs at last, slowly, but with a laugh.

"Yes, it's a new one," said Chadwell, the oldest man present. But he did not laugh.

The big man felt for his pipe. "I imagine they have to vary their programme, like other artists," he said lightly. But he found lightness difficult. Indeed, it was from an odd nervousness, that he had taken refuge in artificiality. The nGaka's words held him, and, in an effort to break their spell, he went to the piano and knocked out a song they had all sung earlier. He sang it through as a solo, then swung 'round on the stool, surprised — or was he surprised? — that the others had not joined in. They were sitting exactly as when he had turned his back on them. They had not sung. They had not spoken. And they said nothing now.

It was too much. Suddenly, and out of a clear sky, the burden of South Africa had come back on him. What was it? The old, hated question from which he had thought with such joy that he was free! He looked from one to the other of the men before him. They felt it. The evening — how much more, he wondered vaguely — was

over. He got to his feet. Once, he had tried and failed to wake them from just such dead-eyed dreaming. He would not try again. He thanked them for the pleasure of the evening, ignoring the latest incident, and said good-night.

"Oh, I say," Greg began, with a visible effort.

Four of them got to their feet then, attempting some explanation. The fifth man, Fraser, did not rise.

Something in the boy's inertia struck the big man.

Greg read his eyes, followed them.

"Jem?" he began.

The boy did not answer.

"Jem, I say, Jem!" Paxton demanded. "Jem!" He turned his insistent questioning upon Bradbroke, who, dumb, was loosening Fraser's clothes. "Hammerstone," Greg said swiftly to Chadwell. "He's in the living-room, or was, when I came in!"

"Quick, Chadwell," whispered the big man guardedly. "All right, Paxton," he steadied the singer, "it's just a faint!"

"Carstairs, take Brett off me," Greg commanded irritably. "Here, Hammerstone!"

They stepped back, surrendering Fraser to the doctor, who had followed Chadwell in; watched his practised hand find the boy's wrist; caught his resulting frown; saw him bend to the opened shirt, then straighten up swiftly.

"Get him out of here! I'll take him myself. The next room. More air!" Hammerstone swung the body gently up in his big arms. "Wait," he said. Then went through the door, which Greg and Chadwell held back for him.

"I say, Hammerstone, he's just fainted, you know," Paxton begged, from the window to which the American had dragged him.

"That's all it is, I tell you." the singer insisted, breaking away from the big man, and following Hammerstone.

"Go back!" they heard the doctor's sharp order, followed by the singer's entreaty, and then —— The big man knew that he should see, to his dying day, the look in the singer's eyes, as at last he came haltingly back to them, saying:

"Fraser's dead."

Paxton looked uncertainly around. "He *can't* be, you know, though. Hammerstone'll be in in a moment. Go get him, Hugh." He turned toward the big man as if for seconding. "You leave me alone, Carstairs. I'm going to ——"

Hammerstone's coming silenced him.

An army surgeon, of long experience, Doctor Hammerstone heard them out patiently, then nodded. Told next of the witch-doctor's prophecy, with the additional fact that the nGaka had not come within ten feet of Fraser, and couldn't possibly have touched or wounded or given him anything, Hammerstone nodded again. He had encountered similar cases.

"Not frequently," he admitted, "but more than once." His face was the colour and appeared to have the texture of old leather, tanned with successful perseverance by the torrid sun. He looked at them reflectively, as if he were very old, instead of not yet forty-five. "Don't let this get on your nerves," he concluded. "Remember this is South Africa."

"But the prophecy," Paxton went off.

Hammerstone nodded again. "Only a coincidence."

The big man turned to his partners in the hideous thing.

"Coincidence," he heard Greg demanding of Chadwell. He wheeled back to the doctor. "But, good God, Hammerstone, he's dead!"

Hammerstone, of the old face and the young body, nodded again: the professional calm, which the American found so obnoxious. "I say," the doctor went on, "you mustn't get brooding over this. I know it looks bad: on the face of it, you can't any of you live any great while, for one's been taken at the start-off, and the Thing's *progressive.* But I warn you, you mustn't look at it that way. Call it what I do — a coincidence. That's going to be hard, maybe at first; but take my word for it, and remember I know this country better or worse than any of you do; and every day or two, even I have to build additions to my power of credulity." He stopped to nod his head, as if to himself. "Yes, after all I've seen here! So, I say, if I were in your place, I'd"— he breathed and swallowed — "I'd call it South Africa and a coincidence. As a matter of fact, it *is* that, and, moreover, any *other* theory stops every one of you just where you are." He looked away from them, toward the door. "I'll go back in there."

Again, the musician intercepted him. "But the body, Hammerstone. You know, we don't want ——" He hesitated, then turned to Chadwell. "Tell him what I mean, Hugh!"

Chadwell raised moody eyes to Doctor Hammerstone.

"What are we going to do with his body — with poor

Jem? You can't — oh, I say, can't you do something with — *you* know what I mean, Hammerstone. Why don't you help me out, instead of making me say it? There's got to be a *burial.* I suppose there has. If only" — he caught himself — "if only he'd bolted the country! You know how rotten bad this is, happening *here,* at the club, Hammerstone?"

"Yes." Hammerstone kept his eyes fixed on the bare floor, then looked up. "See here: I've got the hospital, and men dying off every day or so. We'll — I mean you mustn't any of you say Fraser's *dead.* Let it be he *did* bolt the country! I'll tend to the body. I say, you're making a scapegoat of me. But never mind. I'll fix it. I'll have it buried with the '*unclaimed*' ones! I'll have the ambulance pick it up in the street. By heaven!" after a glance at his watch, "you know, it's near two o'clock in the morning? I'll have the ambulance get around here *now.* By the time it gets back to the hospital with it, I'll be the only man on duty there, and I'll see to it."

Carstairs caught his arm. "Of course, you know you're acting no end fine in this! And you'll tell us ——" He turned back to Chadwell. "Tell him, Hugh."

"Hil means about the interment, Hammerstone," Chadwell said. He looked across to Carstairs. "That's what you mean, isn't it?"

Carstairs nodded.

Bradbroke stood by, his lips pressing hard together, "The poor, young, little chap. Not three years, hardly, down here!" He moved over to the window. "You'll remember, Hammerstone," he warned, his clean-cut

figure outlined in startling white, against the black background of the glass.

"I'll let you know when," Hammerstone promised. He turned to the doorway, then came back, to stand looking from one to another. "It's odd, you know," he began, in a lowered voice. "You chaps tell me I'm acting no end fine, and you're this and that grateful. You don't know what you'd have done if I *hadn't*. You try to make me think it's for the good name of this club we're all members of. But all the time you know you're thinking of *yourselves;* and *I* know, all the time, that, once I've gone out of here, you'll say to each other, think, anyway:

"'What a cold-blooded devil that Hammerstone is! In *his* place, now——'" He nodded his head again. "You'll think that *and* say it, and I *know* it. But I'm going through with it. Good-night and don't worry. Let Fraser's bolting the country come out through other people. All the hospital 'll know is that another wanderer's passed out of South Africa. Likely the *News* 'll get hold of it first of the papers. Let 'em! They'll come about, asking; but sit tight, and they'll set our reticence down to the friends we all were with him. Then, they'll run a story about 'Debts and High Living,' ending with:

"'We are informed that the young man was last seen entering an N. G. R. carriage at Pieter Maritzburg. But this is probably only an effort to deflect suspicion from his real destination — the Cape, and a steamer to the States or to England, ultimately.'

That will add it to the long list of 'unfortunate young men who should never have come to South Africa,' and it'll be forgotten in a fortnight!"

He went to the door again, and, this time, opened it. "Good-night, you chaps, and don't think too hardly of me for helping you."

"Good-night, Hammerstone," from Carstairs and Bradbroke. Followed quickly, by a "Good-night, Hammerstone, old chap."

"I say, you're acting any amount fine," Carstairs said again.

The musician could manage not one word. Standing beside the American's great figure, he did not make even the trial.

The door swung idly, with an arc which slowly diminished. No one moved until it had found its dead-centre a little off the sill; as at that other visitation, it hung heavily off, measuring the steady thrust of the draft. And the five men studied it as if it were an engrossing novelty.

At last, Greg turned 'round until he faced Ormsby. "I'll be in and see you about this in the morning. I don't know what more we can do about it to-night." He looked from the big man to the others, his lips moving uncertainly, his eyes terrible.

The big man looked down into Greg's white face. "Just right. And I'll stay in until you come," he said, moistening his lips.

Chadwell and Carstairs and the singer had begun moving toward the door. The five reached the street together.

"I say," Paxton came up for an instant to say, "it *was* just a bally coincidence. But wasn't it raw of Hammerstone!"

"Hammerstone's a cold-blooded beast," agreed Carstairs. "Perfect swine! And he called it a '*coincidence.*'"

The three left Ormsby and Greg saying something about Chadwell's rooms.

Looking after them, the big man saw, without surprise, that each walked uncertainly, and that Greg, at his side, instead of being refreshed by the salt wind which blew in their faces, was staggering like a drunken man. And he knew that he had never so fully realized his own strength as now: a sudden chill had come on him; but he saw by his shadow, which loomed like a ghost ahead of him when he passed each street-lamp, that he himself was walking straight. "Hackluytt," he thought. "If only we'd remembered!" He meant if only they had heeded the warning of the white-haired, strong, old man! He knew that Greg and Carstairs and Paxton and Chadwell had remembered as tardily as he himself had. For they had not once spoken of Hackluytt. To all, the big man realized, it had seemed better not to confess having forgotten words recalled now too late. A tremor shook him as he walked.

CHAPTER IX

IT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAN TO BE ALONE

YES, he was walking straight. One light after another, as he passed beneath, confirmed it. He was walking straight. But into what? And the ghostly shadow which preceded him, always aiming at that unguessable destination, suggested another ghost — the one which loomed *behind.* No shadow, this. He did not know what it was; but, even though averring his ignorance of it, he confessed its palpability.

Or was it palpable? Back in that quiet room, he had just left, had he in truth encountered this haunting horror? He was in Durban, his brain told him; but was there any such thing as Durban? He was in South Africa; but was there any such thing as South Africa? In spite of the automatic obedience of his strong muscles, to his will, he was uncertain almost to the point of incredulity. So that he could still hope — not very confidently, it is true, but in a way he found steadying — that it was all a *dream* which the morning would dispel. By a grim effort of will, he shot his thoughts back to a known and certain anchorage: he had left America for a vacation somewhere. He had stopped off for a bit in London, and a man he'd run into there had set him thinking he might as well see South Africa. Then, the steamer. Cape Town, then. Next, the N. G. R. That

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meant the Natal Government Railway. Then, Kimberley. He had done amazingly well, even for him, at Kimberley, and had a great time of it in a sheet-iron shack with a servant, who loved him, to take care of the place and cook for him. An Englishman named Gregory Bradbroke had run in on him there, and they'd seen a lot of each other. Then, the Englishman had carried him down for a month in Durban. This was Durban. Up there, on Berea Road, this street he was walking on now, lived the Netherbys. There was an English girl there, with them. Her name was Marian Langmaid. She had wonderful hair and colouring, and eyes like English violets. Anne Netherby was engaged to Bradbroke. They were wild to marry and go back to England, but they hadn't the money. The English violet was sorry for Anne. How gentle she was! He had never seen any one like her, no, or any *thing*, except an English violet.

He nodded his head in acknowledgment of his absolute security in seeing her an English violet! It afforded him satisfaction that there had been no delay in his recognition. He should have fallen short, if there had been: all that she was, made it her right that he should identify her instantly.

His thoughts flowed on. He had told her that he would help Bradbroke and Anne Netherby, by putting Greg in the way of making effective investments. He had promised her that he should begin the instant Greg gave him an opportunity; and, after holding away from him for two weeks, Greg had come back into their old relationship, and the chance had started coming. Then,

he had gone to the Regent Club with Bradbroke — that was the name of the club — and the chance would have come straight to him, *if* —— That was it, the thing he came back and back to. And, now, the chance to help Greg and Anne, and to relieve Her, could *never* come.

He shook his head, putting his hand to his forehead. He felt something almost approaching amazement that his chance to do what he now knew that he could never do, had passed with such finality. And his amazement brought him back to his earlier question: after all *wasn't* the evening there, and the nGaka's coming, and — the rest, only a dream? He strove to believe it. He longed for the morning, the morning which should bring him back to himself, the morning which, broken free by the swing of the sun up out of the Indian Ocean, should restore the hope which had been so gloriously dear to him.

It would come. Yes, it would come. But, until it came? He fell back on the question again. He could not get past it! Trying, his thoughts steeple-chased into each other, and he could not stop them. So again he swung them back to America, the land that was real, the land of sound realities: back there, there were a lot of men he knew well and could rely on every time. His classmates, many of them. He was young yet; he'd been graduated only eight years ago; and he thought, with a sudden, relieving warmth, of his undergraduate life, its freedom, its irresponsibility: he remembered a club-dinner, the latest (he would not admit it could be that last) he'd been at; how, in the middle of the singing, a dyed-in-the-wool Easterner had turned to him to say:

"Peoria, Illinois, is *my* ideal town! Does any one here know the *Michigan* song? We don't know how to sing any more at Harvard. To get really good 'harmony,' now, a man has to go to one of the *Western* colleges!"

Yes, Scattergood had been as tight as that!

He remembered, and smiled again, at what another man had told the room of having gone out to buy a water-power. A club-dinner, in junior year, yet holding up the crowd about a *water-power!* "I wanted to buy it," the man had detailed, irrepressibly, "and how much do you think they wanted for ten days of fifteen hours each? What? *Six hundred hours a week.* Make a guess! Make a guess!" He had insisted that the room should "make a guess." And, by the time they had gotten their voices, and begun to "guess" for him, the would-have-been buyer of water-power had fallen asleep, while telling them that "Stepping-stones were but the Failures of Success."

How crazy it had all been! How senseless! But the men were all right: they were rarely that way. Now, they were all eight years out of college, and working hard, took up more space in cars and taxis and 'busses, and had less hair. They were serious-minded enough *now.* He remembered them as he had run on them later in offices of all sorts, and, representing an hundred professions and occupations on the streets. They were working hard, getting *over*-serious, some of them, *most* of them; some of them had struck him as having forgotten what relaxation was! But they had been irresponsible then — that evening when Scattergood had preached of Peoria, and Harding had drowned them with his water-power. How typical of that time had been that Irresponsibility!

These and a thousand other unrelated, distracted, disorganized thoughts telescoped into each other through his runaway brain as if flung there by a jeering imbecile. Jeering, for that Irresponsibility was gone, now — with such desperate speed and irrevocability that he could already look back on it as on a thing which had not been his in a century. They were as far behind him, those happy, idle, careless, care-free days, as if they had never been his even momentarily. Some time —— He caught himself. What had he been going off on then? On, his thoughts flew, automatically, and he was as far as ever from being able to intercept or catch up with them. It was as if he were just on the point of falling asleep, had, that is, that easing contentment which, already merging into restful oblivion, abandons thought, and even self, in sleep.

But he knew it was not that. He knew that he was fighting to get back his point-of-view of two hours before, one hour, half. He was trying to get back behind the instant when the witch-doctor had gone and Fraser had *died;* he was struggling to get back to the moment when, so full of hope and confidence in the ability of himself and his money to keep his promise to Her, he had said, in his heart:

"Greg's come back, and brought me the chance to help him. In the morning, I'll have something to tell Her!" He was trying to get back to that.

But he couldn't. For this was in truth South Africa, Durban; and the witch-doctor had really said that; and Jem Fraser, the English boy, *had* died. That was what had to be faced now. It was what was before him. He

was walking into it, and it was following him. It was a terrible misfortune, and he had earned it in no way. But it was *his!* Death, fast and soon!

Moreover, he knew that the Thing must always be with him, no matter where he went or how long It let him live. It would always be on the tip of his tongue to tell people about It, precisely as the man with a physical affliction always tells people about *that*, as if his fear that they wouldn't discover his loss, otherwise, were his closest, most lively thought. The only difference between himself and the physically disabled man was that, whereas the physically disabled man could tell people, he himself must go through the world without the relief of confessing speech.

But he would not leave South Africa. He should stay on in Durban. Though his power to help Anne and Greg for Her had been so mercilessly taken away from him, he should stay on because —— The truth flashed before his eyes, then: it was so that he should be near her, close to her; her gentleness was what his stricken strength needed. He could not do anything, now; but he had seen her sympathy. Her softness and her girlish fragility would support him. How he needed them, needed all that he knew she was! He would like to go to her now, and kneel down beside her and feel, on his face, the touch of her small, soft hands.

Somehow, he had found his way to his rooms, and staggered up the stairs to them. If only he could feel her hands on his temples! His face went down. The sun swung up out of the Indian Ocean. Morning! But the hands which pressed his temples were his own.

CHAPTER X

MORNING

MORNING! And, on the instant, the air was a glitter. The cool air of the night was stolen. His rooms seemed a vacuum. He knew that the wind had changed, and now flowed down out of the equator 30 degrees to the north. He realized that he was fully dressed. A fresh riddle. He was cramped. Why? Before he was conscious of the gamut his thoughts had raced through, they had circled back, like a hover of pigeons, and he knew that he must see Bradbroke, look him up, for Bradbroke might delay, and even the bare thought of delay was insupportable. For so much hung on the answer to the first question he should ask Bradbroke: if Fraser were really dead.

He threw off his clothes, and shaved, and splashed himself with cold water. Ordinarily, he would have done his setting-up exercises, as any anatomist would have known from the muscles of his arms, legs, and back, or from the way he moved. But now, iron-bound as the habit was, the big man did not once think of his setting-up exercises. Breakfast somewhere — to fill in the time. Then, Bradbroke. Then?

In what seemed a very long time to him, yet was a matter of only a few moments, he was standing in the street. Then, he realized that it was not six o'clock yet.

Most of the city slept. Bradbroke, asleep or awake, would ill-receive him before nine. And he turned back, up his two flights of stairs, glad that he had removed his stuff from Greg's rooms, and got rooms of his own a week before. But of one thing he was sure: that he could not wait for Bradbroke until nine.

Unconsciously, he had gained the habit of asking himself questions, and the fact recurred to him. The fact, and its predecessor — his old, unthinking habit of the affirmative: before, he had always said things straight out; things had always been so or not. He had claimed the right of decision. In the old, irresponsible days, which, he realized now, had lasted up to the hour of Fraser's dying, he had rarely asked questions, least of all of himself. He had never been very analytical. There had been no need. But now ——

He threw the curtain back, let the light in, and stared at himself in his mirror. Then, he leaned closer, though his first emotion had been amazed aversion: did he look like *that?* More questions! He'd got to stop asking himself questions. The habit led a man nowhere, or it depressed him. Either must be avoided. He didn't know which was worse. Realizing that he was talking aloud for companionship, he felt very much alone and shook his head.

"This sort of thing is all wrong," he said aloud. "I've got to get hold of myself."

And he fell back on his habit of exercise as a means of getting hold of himself. He went through all his contractions, and twists and turns and swings, until his blood ran free and his muscles gave friendly, pleasantly

reminiscent cracks. Then, the best imitation of a shower-bath his equipment could manage, and he dressed, wondering how he could have gotten into his clothes before, without first having those eighteen exercises and the rub-down.

Then, he descended the stairs again; and, this time, making the sidewalk, swung off down the street, his pipe, charged with the strong, dry, Boer tobacco, lighted, the smoke, another friendly thing, tasting as good as the carbonite stem, between his lips.

As he knew that he should, he walked the length of Berea Road and came to the Netherbys'. There was no sign of life or motion there, and he was anxious — until he looked at his watch again. It was going — somehow, somewhere, he had wound it — but —— He looked at the clock in the square: it was only half-past six. Two hours and a half until nine and Bradbroke.

He turned up Essenwood Road. Seven. Then, Pine Street. Half-past. Next, West Street, where the coolies and Kaffirs lived — no, he remembered that was Pine Street, he hadn't noticed; but now seemed to remember that some of them had stared at him stupidly. He hated them, and wished that he could find excuse for using his fists on them, the desire so strong that he walked back to Pine Street. But no chance offered. Still, he had gained by the detour, for it was eight o'clock, when he swung into Berea Road again. Half-past eight, by the time he made his lodgings again. It would be nine, in an half hour. Then — yes, and there was Bradbroke, waiting for him on the steps.

The big man's mirror had showed him a face which

reduced his pulse, then raised it. But not even his memory of his own face had prepared him for the face of Greg: the Englishman had the look of a young man turned suddenly old; he was unkempt, who had always been so immaculate; he was unbrushed, and unshaven; he could not have washed in a fortnight. He must have gone crazy!

In another moment he had Bradbroke up the stairs with the door fast.

"Look here," he broke out, "you can't go on this way! You remember what — what's his name? Hammerstone said: we're not to tell people. And you will, if you keep this up. Go in there and fix yourself. My clothes won't do. They're too big; but you can manage with my razors and brushes and the rest!"

In his anxiety, the American had asked the younger man nothing. But after Greg had obeyed him and emerged from the dressing-room, the question came back dominatingly, and he shot it;

"Brad — have I got it right: did the witch-doctor say that, last night, and *did* Fraser *die*, Bradbroke?"

"Yes," Greg said with an effort. "You . . . you've got it — right."

The big man stood motionless. After all, he had known it all along. He looked slowly about the room. How quiet everything was! He went to the window. Clearly, the city still lacked their secret, theirs and Chadwell's and Paxton's and Carstairs', for the low-lying hive blinked negatively, its aspect all unchanged. Then, he went back to Bradbroke, at once to wonder again at that gray, set face.

"Bradbroke, I tell you again," the big man said, "you've got to go about it differently; once you're seen like this, the first man you meet, after it's out, will start an inquiry. I tell you ——" He leaned closer to the younger man, placing a big hand steadingly upon his arm.

At the touch, Bradbroke started, then sank back again.

"Oh, it's all right for *you*," he broke out.

"All right, you say," the American breathed, in a low whisper. "You say it's all right with *me?*" It was hardly a question. He was remembering his first thought, on the sight of Bradbroke, half an hour back: that Greg had gone imbecile.

The younger man read his eyes. "No, I'm not that, anyway not yet. I mean you're all right — in comparison." He watched the big man for a long moment, then shook himself free: "Yes, and you *are*, too, I say, *in comparison*, for you know It's not going to hit you until It's finished us. And you *do* know that, don't you? Of course, you do!" He was affirming and demanding with equal resentment. "You can sit tight, and watch It pick us off like birds on a branch! I say, ain't that so? While *we* ——" His voice trailed off into an unintelligible whisper of black brooding and weakness. "All *we* can do is *wait*. How many of us are there in it? Four left, and you. Two, three, four. *Then*, the one that's left of us. Then, *you*. But how about *us?* Is it going to be me next, then Chadwell, then Paxton, then Carstairs; or Chadwell first, or Carstairs, or Brett Paxton, then ——" He sent his arms out, and lay back in his chair. "That's what I mean," he said. "*In comparison!*"

And the big man heard himself saying, "I beg your pardon, Bradbroke. I hadn't thought of *that*."

He had not thought of it. This side of the misfortune, which had wrecked their lives, had not occurred to him. It had been so personal, had so suddenly and wholly incapacitated him from even attempting the thing he had set his heart on, that, in the daze of his own misery, he had not once considered the more immediate fate of the other men. The thing had seemed his alone, a cursed monopoly. But he knew now; and, knowing, saw that Bradbroke's portrayal of their position had been not more terrible than accurate; and he tried to think of the sensations of Bradbroke and the other three, Chadwell, and Paxton, and Carstairs.

Yes, "in comparison," he *was* "all right," for, as Greg had said, they must go before he did. Must? The word had come automatically; but he did not retract it or qualify it. He could not. No one could, who had heard that grim prophecy; and even the sheerest skeptic must have been converted to faith by Fraser's death. Must? Yes, that was it: they must go before he did. For him — well, on the face of it, he could still call himself "a good risk," though he felt his flesh creep at the expression, for the "risk," however good, was only an absolute, though uncertainly delayed certainty.

He tried to rouse himself, to tell himself that his state was not so alarming; the four would go first. But Bradbroke —— By Heaven! the thing seemed on him even now: he was only a boy, with a boy's eyes, the wistful eyes of one who looked into the world with a hope half-hoped for, instead of a steady confidence. The

big man knew the type well. He had thought they were pretty much their own fault. He had thanked heaven that personally —— But he had come to realize, later, that people were pretty much as they were born, or marred, or made.

The American looked at Bradbroke guardedly, then with frank pity. For the boy was sitting just as Ormsby had placed him, in the chair. He was facing the wide-thrown window, looking out on —— The big man wondered what Bradbroke saw. Not the Netherbys' roof, he hoped, though he feared it. Yet, better that than the stark, half-nude figure of the barbaric prophet of only ill; and even *that*, better than the body of Fraser, settled low, white, inert, and drooping, across Hammerstone's sustaining arms.

"Bradbroke, old man," he said. "Greg!" As if Greg had been a younger brother, the big man steadied him with his arm.

The other shivered. "Don't," he begged. "Don't look at me like that. Am I so ——" Instead of finishing, he got to his feet, and turned his slender back to the window. "I tell you, we've got to *do* something. I mean Hammerstone's been at me. I remember what he said we'd say of him, but Carstairs is right: the man's a perfect swine. They *get* that way, I suppose — doctors! He came in, just as I was leaving to come here. Says it will be this afternoon at three. In the hospital plot. He says we can come, you and Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs and I — as if we just wanted to look about the hospital. He's going to show some of what he calls his 'pet' cases. Horrible, isn't it! They *get* that way!"

He nodded sagely as if what he knew about doctors enabled him to read them like an open book. "Where was I? Saying we're to go through the hospital. Hammerstone's to be *surprised* to see us come in: it's to be:

"'My word, this is the last thing! You chaps *here*?' Good-fellowship, you know. Then, he'll say:

"'Nothing much on, this afternoon! No operation that amounts to anything. Putting a chap underground though. Care to see how it's done here?'" He stopped short. "Horrible, isn't it? Worst kind! Couldn't have believed it!" He stopped again, shaking his head, drearily. "I've seen the others, and they're promised. We all ought to go. No more than right. I say, you'll meet us there at three?"

"Of course," said the big man. "Meet you there at three."

He knew that he should not go, that he had not the least intention of going. By a miracle of will, he had heard Bradbroke out, and deceived him into gratitude for the promise. But he knew that he should not go, that Bradbroke himself would not go, or Chadwell, or Paxton, or Carstairs. He knew that they, like himself, would hide themselves the deepest they could at three; that not that afternoon, or ever, live as long as they might in South Africa, would they go, or allow themselves, consciously, to be carried, to that hospital!

Greg was speaking again. "Some one had to tell you. I mean one of *us*. I didn't want to be the one. Tried to make Chadwell: he's always — but he said this was different: said I was the best. Said I'd gotten you into

this and played skittles with your life, by bringing you down here from Kimberley."

"Greg!" Just the one word. But to the big man, at least, it answered Chadwell. Then, the American's strong hands went to the slender shoulders. "You said I was all right, Greg, *in comparison*, and I understand what you mean, now. But I'm going to ask a difficult thing of you: I'm going to ask you to believe that you yourself won't go until after the others — that you'll be next to me. It's best, really. And, after all, though this has knocked us all down, we won't stay down. We'll just suppose that, whoever's the next, will have good, long years before he goes. I say it's the best way to think of it, Greg. It's the only way. And all this assuming that Fraser *wouldn't* have died last night if it hadn't been for that fiend's prophecy."

Greg looked the American over with perfectly open curiosity. "You mean you've forgotten what Hackluytt said, and can think Jem would have died there, then, *anyway?*" He drew back from the big man as one might from proximity to a powerful animal whose malady might at any moment become dangerous. "I say, do you mean that? No rot, mind," he warned.

The big man met his eyes miserably. "Greg, I'm making the best I can of it. God knows, I remember how Hackluytt warned us. But, equally, I know that even a man as sound-looking as Fraser may drop any minute. For anything beyond that, I go by Hammerstone." He told himself that Greg must be gotten out of his present mental state in *some* way, and truth had failed. "So, I say, make the best of it. We've all got to. And

I say again we're alive still, and probably will live a stack of years yet. I admit I'd feel differently, if Carstairs came in, now, and told us that Paxton or Chadwell had gone; but so far ——" He saw that Greg had forgotten him. "You're going to tell her? You'll feel you *must.*"

It jerked Bradbroke 'round, like a hand on his collar.

"Tell *her!*" he cried out. "*Tell her?*"

"I should think," the big man began. "Her right ——"

Greg turned away blindly:

"You don't know what she's been through already. She musn't have this, too. No, she mustn't have this, *too!*" His lips broke. He made a groping gesture with his hands, and walked, without a word, from the room.

And the man he had left looked after him, seeing as little. Mechanically, he had taken his watch from his pocket; and, as he held it without looking toward it, he remembered that he was due, at five, that afternoon, at a garden party. Lady Bam's invitation: a big man, a friend of her husband, was up from the Cape. There would be people. He slipped his watch back. Five o'clock. There would be a great many people. Strangers. He should meet many of them and have to talk with them. Five o'clock. It was not yet ten. He had seven hours in which to fight to get his poise back. When had he begun to realize that he had a "poise"? But seven hours! Seven *centuries!* Could he hide from any one of them, even the dullest, what an effort of will it had been for him to *come?*

CHAPTER XI

THE FRUIT OF SEVEN HOURS

HE WENT. He had told himself — and at last come to believe—that it was best that he should go. The decision had not come all at once: at eleven, after an hour's analysis, the feat seemed to him more than ever impossible. At twelve, he felt that his brain must have tilted, if he had even once seriously considered going. One o'clock. He had eaten, and, since then, smoked continuously, beginning to feel something half resembling self-confidence. But he had remembered *three* then; and, though three was two hours away yet, he had been able to see Hammerstone, the man of neither blood nor nerves, and the body, which lay each instant more clear and dead before their eyes. He could hear Hammerstone say, providing the others did go to the hospital:

"My word! You chaps *here?*" And their scheduled answer:

"Nothing else to do." Then the rest of the rigmarole. Gad, his brain had turned! Two: *Three.* He lay in his rooms. Four. Somehow, he had stood the hours out. Then, perhaps to escape visualizing Hammerstone's unfeeling faithfulness to his promise — by heaven! he had *seen* Hammerstone doing it with his very hands!—he had girded himself, and gone firmly down to the street at five.

He said to himself, as he entered Lady Bam's garden: "I shall see no one I shall have to say ten words to. I'll be passed along from one to another of a crowd I'll never see again," and was immediately captured by Lady Bam, and presented to her cousin, Lady Haseltine-Clegge, who, with her husband, had accompanied the Duke and the Duchess from the Cape.

The American, who had nerved himself to endure conversation, found it a relief. Yes, it was distinctly a relief to talk with Haseltine-Clegge. It was distinctly a relief to talk with any man who could not possibly suspect, and therefore could not possibly suggest, what the big man was fighting to absent from his mind. From time to time, Haseltine-Clegge brought other men up — men, for the most part called to Durban from Jo'burg, Maritzburg, and Pretoria, by the presence of the Duke; and a good half dozen from Kimberley, who had watched the American's stupendous gains there, and were glad to meet the man himself. He met their wives and daughters. He was beseiged with invitations. Not yet realizing that the trivialities of life, the external, commonplace things always come in mercifully to dull the edge of tragedy, he marvelled at the power of these Africanders so to steady him by their banalities. In anticipation, he had held meeting these strangers an ordeal, but, when at last he took leave of Haseltine-Clegge and the rest, he confessed lasting gratitude; and he even smiled as he worked his way toward the gate.

Yes, he was glad he had come. How happy and unconscious all these people were — the crowd coming and going! Nearby was a pavilion, tented for dancing. He

could hear the orchestra — drum mostly; and, looking over the shoulder-high railing, could see the dancers apparently merely bouncing up and down. From time to time a young fellow would come out saying, to this one and that, that he was looking for his sister: he had just left her "here," he said, each time; "just here." He would look about nervously. And each time, some one of the boys he appealed to would ask:

"What colour was she? I'll help you, old chap. What did she have on her head?"

They were coming and going all around, now, for the afternoon was fading. Some of them nodded frankly to him, setting him wondering where they thought they had seen him before. He knew none of them; but the large proportion were English, their faces familiar in all but identity. And he smiled, and nodded back to them. His poise was coming back, his youth. He lived again. He was young still; still not yet thirty. Not even the presence of Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs, though he discovered them quite unexpectedly, tilted his regained equilibrium. He was sorry for them, but not one with them. They were Exiles, as Catherine Hetheridge had said. He moved toward them, was about to speak to them, when he came suddenly upon Catherine herself.

He wished that he might have avoided her, but wondered how she would be, this time: in the spirit in which he had last seen her, or wearing her earlier manner — her strange, oddly absent bravado?

She was neither. "Glad to find you," she said, holding out her hand, which caught his with the grasp almost of a

man. "I didn't know whether you'd remembered, or forgotten and gone back to Kimberley."

He waited. If she were acting, her achievement was magnificent. On the other hand, holding such multifold contradictions, she might for the moment mean to be genuine. He was quite at a loss. Only the fact that her eyes rested on him, recalled their talk at her gate; yet, even in this, an observer would have read no concession or recognition, by her, of any attribute; for her manner, despite the frank hand-clasp, was impersonal — such as she might have accorded a tolerated, married, middle-aged, male relative.

She puzzled him. Perhaps, she saw this, and was pleased to preserve it, for she spoke again, before he could: "I said I thought you might have gone back." Then she changed, "I mean I hoped you had. No," as he looked down at her, "don't think I'm going back to that. Only, I want you to know that I remember, shall always remember. And — well, it's just as I said: you can't do it. You're the most direct and — and best-equipped man I've ever known, but not even you can do it. They've got to go on as they are, and I ——"

He held up a warning hand.

She inclined her head, and said in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone: "I won't, then. But it's all mapped out and laid down for us. It's the beds our fathers' ill luck or ours have made for us, that and — South Africa!" She turned half from him as calmly as Haseltine-Clegge had done a quarter of an hour earlier. "What a world it is! What liars we all are! See that tall, absolutely dressed woman? No, that doesn't identify her to you. That

woman in gray, with the profile? That — oh, *can't* you see her! Well, the fifth woman toward me from the table with the gray sunshade? Now, you see her, and I can go on: I interested that woman. She's the Countess of Carrick. It's away up somewhere in Scotland. She's asked me to stop there, this winter, *when I go back.* She thinks I'm going. She believed me. I said what liars we all are, and I'm merely defining! Witness what I told my Countess about this winter and home. Even gave her the *month!* Why not," she demanded, though without looking up at him, "when everything about me is untruth — face, figure, manner, clothes even? My gown impressed my Countess. Right, too, for (I'm going to tell you, for I want you to know, and you wouldn't, otherwise) this coat is Irish lace, mind, over a gown of French handwork. The hat's not much, maybe: only cream straw, pink roses and green leaves; but the green matches what holds the coat across, here," she raised her hands to her breast; "and it's a good green: as *every woman knows,* it brings out the gold in your hair and the pink in your face, if you've got 'em, and I *have.* Just as these pearls," her hands went to her round throat, "show off my skin."

Not once had she looked at him.

"They're the last of my relics. My grandfather's. I'll tell you about him: he lived the life of a recluse at Hyde Park Gardens. By parsimony and safe investment he ran up the £100,000 his father had left him to three quarters of a million. He quarrelled with every one! He shut himself up in his house and saw none of his relatives for fifty years! We ransacked his house at his death for his

will; but none was found. Every book in the place was separately examined, but to no purpose. In fact, we never found that will. In the end, the fortune was divided among all of us. Then, there was much litigation. My father's solicitors named their sons after him . . . and retired and opened town houses, when the courts finally heard the last of it. I've told you the rest: my father died, and we came to South Africa. Strikes you as beside the point, maybe; but I'm telling you where my pearls come from. Are you clever enough to see I'm putting my best foot foremost in telling it? Try to make it out, and, if you can't, take my word for it! They're mine, and they came to me from my grandfather, though you know I'm trying to make a Mrs. 'Turvydrop' out of Madame Zelig at £30 a month and nothing 'found'! Come over and give me some tea — I mean let me give you some, some time. I'm 'in' always. How we've rambled! If these people heard us! Do you ever think how one would electrify people if he *spoke his thoughts?* Probably not. You're an exception, and your closet is empty; but the *rest* of us ——"

Again, and still without glancing at him, she sent her slender hands out. Her throat swelled, lifting the rope of pearls. "If, *now*, I should shout what I'm thinking, my Countess I liked so ——"

She raised her head, for one instant letting him meet the eyes which were the colour of the blue soil about Kimberley. "'You've set me confessing again. You'll always have people doing that. I'm not complimenting you. I'm stating your function. I suppose part of it's your not talking, and ——" She cut the words off.

There was nothing diamondiferous about her strange eyes now. She turned from him, then back to him. "In ten years, five, how much of this shall we remember? Little, I hope; and pray, not one thing. Don't look about so industriously, for she's not here. She's reading aloud to Anne Netherby. Isn't she, Hugh?"

Turning with her, the big man saw that Chadwell had come up and was watching, moodily.

"Yes," he said. "That is, I've not seen her. I'll ask Paxton and Carstairs, if you like?"

She allowed him to believe that the interest had been hers. "Thanks, no. It's no matter. I'll run over, directly."

It was almost a dismissal, but Chadwell stayed. "There's something ——" He hesitated, then swung to the big man. "Seen the *News*?"

As he spoke, he passed the folded newspaper to Catherine.

"It's about Jem," he explained, slowly. "It says he's — gone."

"Gone? You mean ——"

With a control at which the American marvelled, Chadwell reassured her. "Not that, or I'd have prepared you. Just bolted the country. Says he was seen, this morning, about noon, boarding the N. G. R. at Ladysmith. Must have ridden all night to do it. We saw him, you remember, Ormsby, at the club, last night. Seemed all fine *then*."

The American nodded. He was grateful that the girl's eyes were on the paper, which shook in her fingers. "Can't something be done? I should think he could be — traced."

"Not much hope in that, I'm afraid," Chadwell discouraged. "Not out *here!*"

"But——" Catherine began. Then, "Poor little Jem! Poor, little Jem! I wonder what ——"

Chadwell nodded slowly. "I've just seen Paxton and Carstairs. We're looking for Bradbroke. Have either of you seen him? He ought to know."

Looking here and there, Chadwell turned away from them. But, after a step or two, he came back. "I say," he began, "we'd best be as light as we can in judging him." It was very well done, for he looked at the American. "He's probably left a fair bit in the way of debts behind. . . . Probably, that was it. Then, too," he was still addressing the big man, "he'd had the worst sort of a facer from home. A girl. So you won't ——" The man was wonderful: the absolute embodiment of one loyally shielding the reputation of a friend."

Indeed, Chadwell's characterization was so shade-perfect that the American found his rôle ready and waiting, when played up to in so rare a way. He said:

"No need, Chadwell. There's no need in the world! Then, too, you remember I knew him myself, a little, and that counts with a man like him."

"Beg your pardon," Chadwell said gravely, "only all of us had known him so *well*, and you know a chap ——"

"I *know*."

Paxton and Carstairs came up. "Seen Greg?" the singer asked, in little more than a whisper.

While he answered in the negative, the big man studied them: they had themselves not quite so well in hand as Chadwell had; just, even then, they were admirable.

"Horrible!" Paxton went on. "I can't simply bring myself to believe he's —— Come along, Carstairs: Greg's probably at the Netherbys'."

"I'll go with you," said Chadwell.

The girl looked after them, then sighed. "I think I'll go home, Mr. Ormsby," she said, in the odd, detached way which he knew he should always associate with her. "And I'll take this." She indicated the green pages of the cheaply gotten out newspaper. "Poor little Jem, I wonder" — she stopped, then went on, "I wonder what he — I hope he finds what he went for," she said. "He'd never have found it *here!*"

Then, she turned absently from him, hesitated, half-turned back, then walked away slowly, leaving the big man standing silent and alone.

CHAPTER XII

THE WISDOM OF HAMMERSTONE

ALONE! And yet, as he walked to his rooms, after leaving Lady Bam and the others, he felt marvellously less lonely than he had nine hours, or even three, before. Moreover, now that the *News* had spun its "explanation" of Fraser's exit, the big man's position oppressed him decreasingly.

He was able to look ahead, now; able, too, to look back even to three o'clock, to Hammerstone, and the hospital plot, the last resting-place of the "*unclaimed.*" Indeed, looking thither from his present security, he was amazed that, among so many hysterical men — himself, Bradbroke, Chadwell, the singer, and Carstairs — even a doctor could have preserved his sanity. Sanity? Yes, by Jove! Hammerstone had been the only sane one! He himself, who had always prided himself so on his nervelessness, had gone off, like a girl, because a crazed nigger fakir had mumbled, and a boy, whose heart was probably bad anyway, had died. Of course, the witch-doctor had been a hard-looking ticket. Never before had been such a Death's head on such a Devil's body! To imagine the Pit preceptored by similar fiends was enough to turn any man's thoughts toward rectitude! And Fraser's dying *had* been staggering. Let the thing have happened in any club even in New York or in Boston,

in broad *daylight*, with the prophet a *white* man, and it would have been staggering! But Hammerstone had been right: it was only a coincidence! Of course, he couldn't tell Her anything about it, but it would be good to see her. . . . In another moment, he was on his way to the Netherbys'.

He reached the house, even before he was aware that he had begun to climb the drive, and his heart leaped, as he thought of what it meant to him. By heaven! how much he had forgotten, through the dark hours from which he had come! Well, he'd make up for lost time, now! There'd be tennis and cricket and hunting and the races. Gad! he'd forgotten race-week, too. It was waiting!

So was a slender, girlish figure, distinct in the half-light on the top step toward which he was rising. And, in his joy at her, the big man hardly heard Greg's:

"There you are, Ormsby! Just going to send for you!" And Anne's, "Really, we were, Mr. Ormsby. We've been talking of that terrible story in the *News* of Jem. Hugh says he showed it to you and Catherine. Or did *you* tell us, Catherine?"

Without waiting for Miss Hetheridge, whom the big man now saw for the first time, Anne raced on: "Isn't it the most horrible thing you ever heard of? Greg's told me everything. Do you think there can be any truth in it?"

They had crowded up around the American. But Greg interfered.

"Oh, I say, Anne, and the rest of you, don't drive him off this way! As a matter of fact, he knows less about it than any of us do, for he's not seen Fraser above half a

dozen times. If you want any details, ask *me*, and I'll go over all I've said again."

There were corroborating "That's so's" from the men; and the big man went to Lady Netherby for a moment, then almost at once, had regained his place at the side of the English violet, and even led her a little way from the rest.

He had planned to talk at first of Fraser, though only for her relieving; and he was grateful that the subject had been so thoroughly reviewed, and so adroitly, by Greg and Paxton and Chadwell and Carstairs.

It was a welcome change of thought to turn to what he planned for Greg, to affirm, again, to her, that the speculations into which he should be led could not go awry, to remind her, again, all that it would bring to Greg and to Anne — marriage and England. He laughed.

"The hardest part's going to be our having to go so slowly until we've actually gotten him speculating."

She smiled, and nodded. "But *then!*" Her hands came together. "I can hardly wait for it!"

He thrilled at her tribute — her unquestioning faith in him. "I think it's very fine and wonderful of you." she said, shyly, in his hesitation. "I'm very glad that you felt willing to tell me; and I'll be very careful not to let Anne suspect."

"Suspect *what*," Anne demanded, accusingly. With Greg, she had come up behind.

"Something that's very nice but mustn't even be guessed at," the girl laughed back.

Greg's eyes, which had been studying the big man, brightened.

"Then," he said, "we mustn't even attempt to attempt to guess."

Carstairs joined them then. The tête-à-tête was over. Still, though the big man had hardly an uninterrupted moment with her, during what remained of the evening, he was smiling happily when he went, at last, to his rooms.

"For the world's going on again, and we're in it," he said aloud. He ran through his exercises jubilantly, and, in the same room in which he had sat, with his face in his hands, through the preceding night, he now went quietly to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WORLD WENT ON AGAIN

THE world went on, and they with it. Each day, the air seemed brighter to him, the universe fairer. The world went on, and they with it. A thousand things flowed in, little, meaningless, pleasant things, which filled his time and insured his thoughts. Tennis, drives, dinners. Though the races would not be on for a long week yet, some of the best of the visitors had already come up from the Cape and down from Pietermaritzburg, and still others from Pretoria. They were getting used to the track, getting ready. He was much at the Netherbys'. Others demanded him. He was impressed, American though he was, into the English service — for the club theatricals.

He took all of it gladly. At times, the face of Fraser rose pallid before him; at these unsought glimpses backward the big man pitied the boy for his early fate as he had not pitied him, or any of the rest, in life. But, except at these visitations, decreasingly recurrent, he forgot Fraser. Indeed, the boy was recalled less and less even by those who had known him best, and, of necessity, must have missed him most. Of all these, Catherine Hetheridge was the least callous — another unguessed element in her various complexity — for she was rarely alone with the American without harking back to

what, in another, might have seemed a personal deprival.

"For he was only a boy," she would say, over and over. "And he'd been out here so short a time!" She spoke of what the world might have held for Fraser, what the world should have given him. . . . Catherine cherished Jem's every attribute and capability increasingly. To the big man, Catherine seemed almost to have loved Fraser. It was unlikely, though. Chadwell, perhaps. Easily! But not poor, boyish Jem. Still, what was ascertainable in Catherine Hetheridge; what impossible? He could not have yielded her his sympathy more if she had realized, as he did, the permanency of her loss. And this new side of Catherine raised her high in his regard. As he pitied Fraser, he pitied the girl who mourned him. For his own peace of mind, the big man tried to forget — and so nourished the memory — of what she had told him of her relations with Madame Zelig and the son, Beaconsfield.

The world went on. He saw Greg and Chadwell and the singer and Carstairs continuously. By now, they had come into the closest association. All sportsmen, they had that strong bond in common, the big man found. Then, too, he was a great reader, which caught Chadwell. He loved music, which drew Paxton. Carstairs generally beat him at tennis, but had to work to his top to do it, which made the victor hold the game of the vanquished, admirable. And he liked Greg so much for Her sake — she loved Anne — that he did not try to identify the strange, singularly hard streak, which, from time to time, he encountered in the younger man. Sometimes, he

wondered about Bradbroke; that hard streak sometimes gave the big man anxiety. But Greg's charm of manner, and his brilliancy, and the rest, made him discount it.

Unquestionably, Greg was brilliant. The big man watched him at the rehearsals for the play, and marvelled at his mastery of the art which had been denied the older man. Yes, on that little stage, as on the larger, the stage of their lives, Greg led his fellows. Chadwell was far more intellectual; Carstairs far more of a force; Paxton infinitely more of an artist. But it was Greg who led. A professional, imported for the purpose from London, could not have drilled them, women and men, more ably or more rigidly. He schooled Anne as rigorously as he did the others. Only Catherine Hetheridge dared openly to rebel; but her acerbities failed to pierce his impassivity.

"I never saw two people fall in love with each other so fast in my life. Did *you?*" Anne laughed to her fiancé, one late afternoon, as the big man and Marian went together from the rehearsal.

Greg did not hear her. He was deep in rewriting some of Carstairs' lines. But, an hour later, when Anne returned to the subject, he started back:

"In love? He mustn't fall in love with her!"

"Why, Greg, dear! Why not? Dad and mother feel just as I do, that it's eminently suitable." Then, since his eyes were still clouded, "Probably, we're borrowing trouble, I mean you are, for her father will never let her marry an American."

"Right, too," he said, his eyes clearing. "I like him no end; but it ought to be an Englishman, for you can never tell just what they'll think is all right—Americans!"

She kissed him, and he patted her hand. "See what you can do, and I will, since you want it. He can't hurt me, though he is a rather terrifying personality."

He laughed with her. "Just don't do anything or say anything that could make her think of marrying *him!* I don't ask anything more than that," he said, with almost perfect naturalness.

"They've got a secret between them, and it's about us," she remembered, "and this shall be ours, about them! And," she laughed again, "I'll be very careful not to let her suspect. You remember she said that? There, on the porch, the evening we went down the harbour in the Duke's yacht. The night after poor Jem went."

"Yes," he said slowly, "I know."

Like him, she had turned graver. "What a cold-blooded, heartless lot we are! A garden party, then a dance and a dinner . . . right after he'd dropped out. It's as if we'd forgotten him over night."

He shook his head. "Not at all: leading our own lives isn't 'forgetting' him. We'll always remember Jem! But I can't see the good in making a fuss about him, when all of us know he couldn't have been worse off than he was here. I say," he broke off suddenly, "remember the rehearsal to-morrow afternoon at five! Chadwell's in Pretoria, on the company's business, and won't be back in time, so I'll have to take both parts; but we'll make the best of it."

"Pretoria," repeated the girl, glancing at the rain-sluiced windows. "Imagine Pretoria on such a day as this!"

"Don't try to. He wasn't keen on going, either. Washout, somewhere in the mines. Remember: five sharp, and see the others come!'

"Yes, mister," she mocked. Then, her arms went about his neck, and she was whispering almost fiercely: "Greg, Greg, think how it will be when we're through with all this, when you've managed the money, and we're married. Home!" She looked up into his face tensely. "Do you ever try to imagine it?"

"Yes," he said uncertainly; then, with sudden defiance, "Yes, *God knows!*"

She caught the strange look, which had leaped into his eyes.

"Greg!" she cried. "Greg!"

"Don't," he half-pleaded. "I'm doing all I can. I've done ——"

"You don't mean — already?" She was so lost in her own emotion that she failed to read his own. "Tell me! Don't you see, I can't wait?"

"It's . . . coming!" Suddenly, the fear she had been too blinded to see in his eyes, left them; he laughed wildly down into her awestruck face. "Don't worry," he flung out. "It's all right!" Then he kissed her, held her a moment hard to him, then was off down the drive.

But his mood changed instantly: he turned, in his rickshaw, and waved his hand to her boyishly; then, having seen her, for one swift second, between the trees, which the curving drive drew together, he faced ahead and stared silently into the beginning night, made almost phosphorescent by the blazing moon.

"Macho!" he cried to the Kaffir boy, who toiled between the shafts of the rickshaw. "Faster!" he cried again, at the bending, brown shoulders. He was tense, restless rather than eager. Anne had disturbed him, her own tenseness and her insistent questioning; and, God knows, he had enough that was disturbing as it was! If only he could have known! He'd got to find Paxton and Chadwell and Carstairs and —— He leaned far forward, on the rickshaw seat, and almost instantly became aware of a big body in white drill, standing, as if waiting for him, at the gate.

"Chadwell," he said to himself, forgetting, for the moment, that Chadwell was north in Pretoria. He looked again. It was Ormsby, the American, but such an Ormsby as he had never seen. The big man stopped him with a short, hard gesture, laid his hand on the wheel, and, leaning over, whispered dully:

"*Chadwell's* gone."

"What!" Bradbroke demanded. "You say . . . speak out, in God's name! my 'boy' won't understand!"

But the American shook his head, his hand closing cold as steel on Greg's shoulder.

"Paxton and Carstairs 'll tell you. Come!"

"Where are they?" Greg began, mechanically. "But it can't . . . I tell you he *can't* have . . . Where?"

"My rooms."

"Get in," said Bradbroke He lurched to the farther end of the narrow seat, started the "boy" with a single word, a groan more than a whisper; then sagged against the big man's shoulder, and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

WHOM CHADWELL LEFT BEHIND

AS THEY encountered the half-light of the street lamps, the big man looked closely at Greg; then, realizing that he might do this with impunity, studied him — profile, attitude, carriage of the head and droop of the slender shoulders, his lamentable lack of anything approaching ruggedness.

The rickshaw came to rest. "Here we are," said the big man. "They're up there."

Neither spoke, while climbing the stairs. At their top, the American stepped back so that the younger man should enter before him, followed him in, and closed the door.

Carstairs and the singer were standing just where he had left them, when he had gone for Greg. He knew that he should do most of the talking, having, in a strange, unexpected way, taken Chadwell's place, and he began at once: "Carstairs, tell Greg where and how Chadwell died."

"You know where he went, Greg," Carstairs began slowly; "it was three days ago. I was at the club with him, when he got his note of instructions. It said that seven inches of rain had fallen in the past twenty-four hours up there, and the Pretoria and the Witwatersrand areas were fast flooding. The May Consolidated dam

had been the first to burst, washing away the embankment of the Glencairn slimes dam; then, the Witwatersrand, lower down the valley, had gone. That was Hugh's company's, and they had got word of it soon after the slimes dam of the Simmer and Jack Mine had gone. They'd hunted him up right off then, and located him with me, at the Regent, the little smoking-room just off the main one. You know, of course. I ——"

The American nodded, his big voice interrupting Carstairs' first lapse into irrelevancy. "Yes, Carstairs, we know. The point is, Greg, that Chadwell appears to have gone up there as fast as anything could carry him. He found fifteen feet of water over the railroad; houses collapsing, and a lot of natives — one hundred and thirty-nine, it was known later — imprisoned in the Witwatersrand. He went down after them. There were six other white men, locked in by that water. I hope I should have had the same pluck, if I'd been there."

That was all. There was no statement by Carstairs or the American as to the fate which had waited the one hundred and forty-six men in those flooded, subterranean, corridors of the Witwatersrand. And Bradbroke asked for none.

"How — I mean, when, did you hear?" he asked at last.

The big man looked across to Carstairs. But Carstairs had done. The musician, meeting the American's eyes, jerked his head convulsively — a gesture ridiculous, in such a man, at any other time; but now eloquent of *anything!* The American turned back to Bradbroke:

"Reuter telegram to the *News*. The editor knew that

Chadwell had lived with Carstairs, and got it right across to him. Carstairs got me, and I went to the *News* office at once, and saw the editor himself and the telegram. While I was there, another telegram came in; but it was only a repetition of the first one for the paper to transmit to Chadwell's company. I went to the company with it, and asked for any details they could give. They were very good about it, considering they had only my word I'd been a friend of Chadwell, to go by. They'd already heard over their private wire. You'd all have liked to hear what they said of Chadwell. Do you know, he was the only white man who'd volunteer to go down? He knew it was touch and go, but there were all those fellows trapped down there, and he didn't waste any time. He'd been down the Witwatersrand a good many times, and thought he knew a way out for them. He got into a bucket and told them to lower him. The last thing he did was to scribble a note, which he left with the superintendent at the surface. That note is to us: you, Greg, you, Carstairs and Paxton, and to me. It says:

"'*If I don't come up, forgive me, and good-bye.*'

"That was last night," the big man went on, after a moment. "The super waited, there at the mouth, with the rest. They waited all night. Waited hours, after that, when all of them knew it was over. Then the superintendent wired the note to Chadwell's company, and the local manager gave the wire to me."

The big man's voice fell. He was trying to picture Chadwell, the long, moody, lean man, writing that short note, to those whom, in obedience to duty, he was, perhaps in the next minute, forever to leave behind. Obedi-

ence? Or had it not been Fate, which had dispatched him in the long reach of the sagging bucket, down into the bowels of the drowning mine. Yes, Fate! The big man affirmed it, just as he knew that Chadwell must have affirmed it, as he stepped into the bucket, and gave the word to the shivering Kaffir boy to lower. With a shrewdness all its own, Fate had made Duty its scapegoat, and sent Hugh Chadwell down!

The American turned back to the others. "I've given it to you just as his firm told me. Don't think I've left anything out. I haven't. It seems old to me already. I don't try to account for the feeling, *but, at the back of my head, I knew it was coming!*"

Through the abruptly dropped silence, he studied them gaugingly, then began again: "We remember well enough what Hammerstone called Fraser's death."

"Yes," Carstairs interrupted, "the *swine!* The cold-blooded, calloused, professional-hearted ——"

Again, the big man controlled him. "No matter about that, Carstairs. We all know!" He looked back to the others, nodding as if to their unspoken thoughts. "There were six of us, that night. There are four now. The question is: what are we going to do?"

Carstairs leaned forward. "Do?" he asked. "You want to know what we're going to *do?*"

"That's right," the musician broke in: "it's bad enough to have you talk on, in your cursed, quiet way, as if you'd read it in a story somewhere. But, when you ask us what we're going to ——" His face changed. "Ormsby, can't you manage something, *anything?*" Like a prisoner, he ran his eyes over the American's great body

enviously. "I say," he trailed off, "what *are* we going to do? We'd got over Jem's going. Almost believed Hammerstone. Know *I* did. Things seemed all right again. But this, with Hugh——" He went back, "Remember how we said we'd been off our heads that night that devil came in? How we said It had hypnotized us; *that* was why we'd made such a *mountain* out of it? End of the world for us? Nothing to hope for after it? Laughed, you remember?" his haggard face seeking their corroboration, "Got the play going? Never got on so well at the rehearsals? All sorts of confidence? Almost believed the *News* had it *right*, and Jem *had* only run away from his debts? All truck! Sane, when we thought we'd been mad, and mad, when we thought we were sane. Sane *now!*" The singer's voice, the rare timbre frayed out, finished without interruption. There was a long silence.

And the big man, looking from one to another of the three men who seemed absolutely to have forgotten him, understood: he knew that their silence cost them nothing, for they could not have desired to say anything. There was nothing *to* say. Not even he, the safest of the four — since the other three must go before he did — could suggest anything; and how much less must there be for them! He knew that they would pass from the room, presently, and, singly or together, realize, as they went out, that they might have looked into each other's faces for the last time. It could be no other way. Nothing could save them from that realization. They might never see each other again! Each *parting*, now, at the club, or at the rooms of any one of them, or at any one

of the houses they met, might be the last. A *good-night* must now have the significance of a *good-bye*. The world would see them as nearly themselves as their wills could muster; but the three would know, just as he did. They must think of it without relief. And each *meeting*, after however brief a separation, would be a *victory*, a staving off, still, of the definite Fate which now bayed in full cry after them.

He knew that he should see at least two of the three again. It was probable, rather, for it was conceivable that the three would go at once. But he expected that one by one would be the way of it. First, one taken, and two left; then another off, leaving one. Then, that one. And *then* ——!

For the first time, his strong face set, and his body sagged with something of the others' inertia. But he straightened his shoulders until his back took on its old flatness. "We've got to look this thing in the face now for it's become an absolute certainty. We've got to watch ourselves, let others take risks. I just said I hoped I'd have done what Chadwell did, if I'd been in his place, but I take that back, for our first duty, from now on, is to protect each other and in no way hasten the Thing's development. We've got to stick together, here in Durban."

"I don't know," Greg said, speaking for the first time, and looking about him in an absent way which suggested Catherine Hetheridge to the big man. "I've been thinking ever since you met me, there at the gate, and right through your cursed sermon, that you'd go back to America. Why under Heaven don't you? *You've* got money. Why

do you hang on here, telling us what we've got to do? Oh, I know you're right," going back to his dead monotone again. "I know all that, but ——" He broke off abruptly, studying the American as one might a curiosity, and saying, under his breath, to no one in particular, "If the Thing were reversed, I mean our places, I'd . . . " Again, he broke off, only again to come back with, "If the chance were *mine*, I'd . . . I say," with a perfectly transparent effort toward casualness, "got any whiskey about the shop, Ormsby? Confoundedly hot, I think. The one thing I've against South Africa is the climate. It's so confoundedly hot. Just like this, most of the time, Ormsby. You'd be surprised." He shook his head, frowning. "Otherwise, it's not half a bad spot, South Africa, just except for the climate! And that's the one thing I have against the country: it's too confoundedly ——"

Carstairs whirled on him. "If you go through that again, Greg, I'll —— " Then, as Bradbroke stared at him, round-eyed, "I've stood all I can ——"

Paxton cut him short with a flash of long hands, tense-fingered. "I know *I* have. I've stood *more* than I can," he was buttoning his jacket hit or miss, and trying to work back his limp shoulders. "I'm going back to my rooms. I'll do anything you say, after I've gone home, to my *rooms*, I mean — as I've just said. I'll do anything you agree to, I mean agree to anything you do. You tell me, one of you, if you can, in the morning. The trouble with this climate ——" He choked back a laugh which would have ended in a scream. "The trouble with *us* is that we aren't taking this quietly. But, you know, I

can't, somehow: all I can think of is who's going to be the *next* one to go. The next one, see? That's all I can think of, *now*, and I — don't — know — what — to do — with — it."

He bobbed his head, half extended his long, slender hand, the hand of a musician, recalled it, hesitated, then went without a look or word from the room.

Carstairs turned, as if liberated to speech by the singer's tread on the landing below. "That chap's got a no end good voice. It's a pity. But," glancing at the pith helmet Paxton had left behind him, "he ought not to go out in this glare bareheaded: I think it's bad for the eyes. Wouldn't matter so much," he explained to the big man, "in a cool climate; but this place is so confoundedly ——"

"Hot," Bradbroke supplied earnestly. "It's the one thing. . . ."

The big man separated them with a single effort of his great strength, "Cut that out," he warned roughly, "or you'll run things off ahead of time. Calm down! We've all got to. It's all we *can* do. Come in in the morning, and I'll try to have something worked out, though I admit I don't know what. Now, both of you go out and overtake Paxton. He's got a wonderful voice, as you've said, Carstairs; and he's got just as wonderful a lot of nerves. Don't worry about his getting a sunstroke: it's night, nearly! But get hold of him and quiet him. About me, I'm going to stay on here and see this — through."

The two younger men looked at the American silently. Then Greg went across to where he stood by the window:

"Much obliged for that, just now," Bradbroke said, unconsciously standing more erect and attempting to straighten his collar.

Carstairs joined them. "Beastly ass, I was! Thanks. Me, too."

Greg took it up again. "And, I say, I'm glad you're going to stay along and see us through with it, I mean up to the last. And Carstairs is. I can't see anything about it, but your being in makes it easier. Come along, Carstairs, or Brett 'll do something."

Both turned toward the door; then, as if in obedience to a common impulse, stopped, half-turned back, hands out, toward the big body which towered, facing them, broad back to the window. Then the hands fell almost guiltily, and the two men went, side-by-side, down the stairs.

As they did so, the big man turned slowly, until his tired eyes had found their direction. Having found it, they brightened for one short instant. Then, as it had done once before, the strong, quiet face went forward and down until it rested in his hands.

And, from him, went those whom he had dismissed, he knew, to imagine his reflections and to envy him. For neither had his secret, no, nor ever should!

Then the big man started back from the window on whose sill his hands had rested, for a gharry had stopped at the gate, and he could see, in the pale light, Anne Netherby, smiling and lovely, and the graver, dearer, fairer young face of the English violet — then the gharry moved away. His door opened.

"Excuse me, Mr. Ormsby, but ——" The maid was holding out a note.

"Back in fifteen minutes, to carry Greg and you home to dinner," it said, and he could hear Anne's laugh in it.

He glanced at his watch. There was time. He meant time in which to secure his secret from her who had been, and should ever be, its glory — to hide it for all time from her, and from those three, whom, with himself, Chadwell had left behind.

CHAPTER XV

FLIGHT

EVEN after he had boarded the train, and knew that he was on his way to Kimberley, he told himself that he was not fleeing from what had already struck Fraser and Chadwell down. It was not that, he said, over and over. And the man was right. He was in flight. With his brave words barely off his lips, he was doing precisely what he had counselled Carstairs and Bradbroke and the singer not to do. Yet he knew that flight had been the only fair course for him since it meant Her safety from his love.

He had left her and lost her. He knew there was unforgivable conceit in pairing the two verbs, that it was sacrilege to affirm that he could have won her love if he had not gone! And yet there was comfort in it, and so absolutely none elsewhere. That she would never know that he had been so unworthy and so arrogant, did not lessen his offence. But what he thought did was his belief that she would have understood even this, if his incredible calamity could have been known to her. He had left her and lost her. He had gone out of her life. He wondered who, in the years that would come —— He clutched his thoughts driving them from a course unendurable!

Drearily, he stared on town after town, one wide

stretch after another, as the track climbed west and north. It was the same waste he had looked out on when he had come down from Kimberley a month before. A month? Barely that. But it seemed immeasurably longer. A very lifetime gaped between that then and now.

Then, he had been careless, care-free, tracing a thoughtless and empty life. When Bradbroke had suggested a month in Durban, how the prospect had bored him! How much more desirable the one-roomed, sheet-iron shack, and his work had seemed! He'd tried to be decent about it, and appreciative — but he had told Greg that he ought not to take the time. He had said:

"I'll be going back to America, shortly!"

How preposterous it sounded now! Preposterous even then to have so much as thought of *ever* going back! For it had presupposed that things would continue to jog on as uneventfully, he meant unobstructingly, as they had done before; that he should continue to be a free agent, his own master; that he should continue to have the right to go and come as he would. But Greg had insisted. And he had humoured him. He had gone to Durban to waste two weeks. Two weeks. A month. And now?

He leaned back in his seat, tearing his eyes from the racing horizon, whose speed set his brain tipping. What was he going to do? Where was he going? Home? What was home to him? Not America, certainly. What then? Durban, the home of the Doom he could never escape from? Hardly! And yet, as he framed the denial, he knew that it should have been an affirmative.

For a Fate, stronger even than that which had already claimed Fraser and Chadwell, had found him there, and he knew it. . . . Love. But at what a cost: Denial of it, Flight from it, so swift and sure that his love, instead of being his boast, must remain a secret which he could never entrust to her!

What now! He'd go off to Kimberley. The place did not matter, but, by going away from her, he had insured her safety from becoming involved in the Curse which had ruined him.

He believed, by now, that he had come to be absolutely frank with himself. *Now*, he knew that she had never cared for him. He had never been sufficiently crazed to think otherwise. He understood, now. And, understanding, he looked ahead, not for himself, but for her, into the future which should be hers: he tried to see the man she would marry — his self-abnegation attained even that. She would marry some one, some one else. The thought was new and terrible to him. Until Chadwell had died, he had not conceived such an imagining possible. And not even then had he so flayed himself as to consider it connectedly. That had not begun until he had looked from his window in the last lingering, sky-reflected day, and had seen her send upward to him, from the gharry, that little, greeting smile. Unseen he had seen it less than he had divined it. He could see it now. It would never escape from his vision. Be the days many or few, which Fate should mete out to him, he should never see anything else half so clear!

She had told him, then, that he must go away from her. How little she had realized the message! She had not

once thought of his going. He had told her that he should stay on in Durban. He wondered if she had believed the "boy" who, by this, must have told her that he "had gone, for a few days, to the Cape." A few days . . . ! He turned his weary eyes to the landscape which, crowding close to the carriage, fled back toward Durban as he himself would have fled, a penitent burning to confess to her an everlasting truth.

What would she think of him? He tried not to answer the question, then tried to forget that he had asked it of himself. She would set him down as another adventurer, a boor, a cad, masquerading under the cleverly aped mein of a man! And better that way, since it would facilitate her marrying the one whom it was destined she should bless!

Anne? Catherine Hetheridge? Carstairs, Greg, the singer? He passed them lightly. In the scope of his renunciation, there was not room for thoughts of them. Children of Fate, they were, just as he was, the men facing a fate grim even as his own.

How strangely it had all come on! How unreal it was, still! Closing his eyes — he was suddenly very tired — he could almost believe that he was back in America: the swaying carriage of the Natal Government Railway was carrying him through placid, peaceful New England, which could never have fathered such a tragedy as his; and the people he knew, in this safe land, could not credit his story though he reiterate it to them to the last, uncertain day of his ruined life. Of course, he could not tell them: he had been assuming merely, in order the better to define, for no purpose he could conceive of, the impassable

limits of their credulity. Then, in the half-dream to which his hopelessness had reduced him, it seemed to him that he *had* told them his story. Not of the English violet, for that had been too sacredly his, too intimate! Never, to any one, ever, could he open the inner shrine of his broken heart! But he had told them of Fraser, Chadwell, Carstairs, and the tense-nerved singer, and of Greg. He had told them, as well, of Catherine Hetheridge and Anne. And, as he talked, he had seemed to see Anne Netherby as he never before had. For he had realized for the first time that she had given Greg his dissatisfied longings, the seeds of which it would have been both safer and kinder, in her, not to sow; she had brought Greg to the point where he could never settle down happily outside of England, and his example had infected the other men of their particular set, just as her eager and bitter restlessness had touched the girls. It was Anne's product. Indubitable as a revelation, he read it: *Anne was an uneasy factor in South Africa.*

"No, I'm going to Jo'burg," a voice behind him said suddenly.

The dreamer's lids opened: he was still in Africa. Durban lay only a short hour behind. Then he stiffened, for, standing at the farther end of the corridor of the carriage, their backs toward him, yet instantly recognizable, were Greg and Carstairs.

For a long moment he achieved the belief that it was only an apparition. One had so many, and a fresh one was no more than natural. But, as the car swung again, he caught Greg's profile, and the quarter of Carstairs' fixed features; and he knew that his eyes had told the

truth. He leaned forward, back, forward: it *could not* be, *must not* be; but was. He rose to his feet, aware but heedless of the long stares he was earning from his fellow passengers, for he was past minding anything he might seem or they might think of him. Not once did he try to guess what those he reeled by thought of him; or what he should say, when once he should have made the door, which now seemed miles distant, and had offered himself to those he sought. He had not once thought of what he should say to them. But he swore to himself that it should be no confession. He would make them do the talking, this time. They would undoubtedly be prepared to, and could say what they would. For they could not realize that he had ——

He was through the door then, saying:

"Carstairs? Bradbroke?"

There was something for the observers to see now: the three men faced each other.

Greg spoke thickly: "In the name of ——"

Carstairs caught his arm, "No, Greg! No need of saying anything," he flung at the big man. "We couldn't stand it out." He thrust Greg back. "It's all up *now*, but why couldn't you have let us go?" He sank slowly down in the nearest seat, snatched something of his old, erect carriage, lost it, and fixed the intruder with accusing eyes.

Only the big man remained standing. "If you had this all planned," he said deliberately, "why didn't you let Paxton in on it?"

Greg's lips moved.

Carstairs made an uncertain gesture. "Would have.

But he was all to pieces, and got — on — our — nerves."

And Bradbroke bowed slightly. "Beastly," he said, with his perfect enunciation and manner, "beastly swine!"

The big man straightened himself. How little, he thought, Greg could know that, in showing his racked nerves by that icy allusion, he had called back another's strength! The American himself marvelled at it, aware of an answering and almost overmastering gratitude. He bent, until his broad hands fell on the two shoulders.

"Then, it's time we chucked this foolery!" And his eyes held theirs, as he added, "Next thing's to get out at the first stop, and get the first train back."

"Back?" Greg leaned away from him, trying to escape the kindly, relentless hand.

"Back," the big man repeated. "We're going back to take care of Paxton. Come," as the train slowly halted. "I think this is Pietermaritzburg."

And, half an hour later, the three who had faced northwest away from what lay behind them, in Durban, entered the train which returned to it. But, through the two hours and a half which followed, they neither stirred nor spoke. And they observed the same silence, as, after abandoning the train at the little station at Durban, they turned, by common consent, in the direction of the singer's rooms.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SINGER'S ROOMS

BUT at the first corner, Greg stopped. "Not there," he corrected. "He wouldn't go there. Don't you see he wouldn't want to be alone. He'd want companionship, look us up, after a bit of wandering, think we were somewhere, the ——" He had been about to say the Netherbys', but cut the words off. "The club," he said. "Best go there."

"Don't think it," Carstairs objected. "May have gone there first, but wouldn't have stayed this while. What do you think, Ormsby?"

The big man shook his head. It seemed to him that they were wasting precious time; but, after all, Carstairs, he knew, would do as Greg said. "Might as well try the club, on the way."

They turned back half a block, crossed through an alley, coming out, in the velvety gloom, between an hotel and an outbuilding, crossed diagonally into Essenwood Road, Greg leading, Carstairs next, the big man following a few steps in the rear.

When they emerged, he found that Carstairs had dropped back closer to him. "Didn't care for that, back there. Too dark! Chap never *knows*." He caught himself, and stepped a little from the big man. "Prob-

ably, you never think of it, but with me——" He hesitated, looking back, narrowly.

Then, they were in the half-light of a feeble street-lamp, which brightened, as they passed on, and upper Essenwood welcomed them with a pale, white, artificial glare. Lights everywhere, now, in hotels, and club windows, rickshaws, gharrys, taxi-cabs, and carriages. And Carstairs, walking more briskly, caught up with Bradbroke, so that the two climbed the steps to the Regent's rooms together, one of them throwing back, over his shoulder, to the American:

"Come on. Of course, he's here!"

But the musician was not. The boy at the door told them.

"But he's been here this afternoon," Carstairs insisted.

"Since five, anyway," Greg's tone was that of one who *knew*.

"No, sir," the boy answered. "Not since noon."

Greg swung in past him. "Best ask some of the men, and then the steward. This fool wouldn't know, anyway!"

But the steward verified the words of the fool at the door. So did Colonel Hackluytt, and a dozen other men, drowsing out the tag end of a dull evening.

"Not since you and he had lunch here, about two! Didn't you?" Meredith, the last one they asked, wasn't clear on the point. Maybe he *had* seen Paxton. Thought now, he probably had, somewhere. With himself and the three of them, they could kill the rest of the evening double-quick! Meredith signalled an attendant for a pack of cards.

Carstairs sank into the nearest chair. "I say, Greg," he began, "you don't need me. You go along with Ormsby, like a good chap. I don't feel——" He turned away. "Let me stick here with Meredith. I'll be here when you come back. Honest to God, I will!"

But Greg's only answer was a dull negative, and Carstairs went with them from the room.

Greg repented, when they had reached the sidewalk. "Had to have you, Carstairs, for Paxton'll be all up in the air! You remember how he was, this afternoon. You're the one: you've been with him a lot more than any of the rest of us."

"Yes," Carstairs said, obediently, "I've been with him a lot. I always had." Realizing that he had dropped into the pluperfect, he raced on: "In fact, I fancy I'm the only chap down here who understands him properly. Then, too, I always play his accompaniments."

"Here," said Greg after the long silence, during which they had walked quickly, "he lives here."

They let themselves in with a key which Carstairs brought from his pocket; and filed, one by one, up the narrow stairs. The stairs *were* narrow, bare almost. In themselves, they told Paxton's poverty. The big man understood, now, why the singer had never invited him to his rooms.

"Brett," Greg called, at the first landing. "I say, Brett, old chap!"

They waited.

"Just so," Carstairs nodded in relief. "Not here."

"Let's try the club again," Greg began. "Unless, of

course," he looked at the big man, "you think we might better go on up and make *sure?*"

"Yes, we'd better go on up and make sure."

"Then go ahead first, will you?" Carstairs voice denied its lighter tone of the past moment. "Of course, he's probably ——"

"Club," supplied Greg, with an effort. "But ——" His voice trailed off, and he indicated the next flight to the American. "'Way to the top," he warned. "Too bad he had to live in such a place." It was the pluperfect again, but, this time, left as it was.

Two flights, three, climbed in deepening silence.

"There. In there," Carstairs said, at the big man's back.

The American knocked, waited, then swung the door in.

If the stairs were bare, the room was barer: only a roll of music, protruding from the half-open door of a cabinet, which stood just to the right of a battered piano, which must have been gotten up there in sections, told them that Brett Paxton had ever lived there. For the room suggested nothing of Paxton, the artist, the exquisite. The American could almost have spanned it with his arms. There was a bed in one corner. It almost prevented the door closing. A book or two, some papers, all with an English imprint; a closet, with neatly-hung clothing in various stages of disrepair; these going oddly with the dim outline of a pig-skin hat-box, half a dozen decent sticks, a riding-crop, breeches, a jacket, pistols in a heavy case with a crest, and a suit of evening clothes protected by a silk outing shirt.

These, the big man's quick eyes took in instantly.

Then, he stepped to the table, over which Carstairs and Greg leaned. And their aspect told him what held them motionless. For on that felt-covered table there was an envelope, sealed, and addressed to Carstairs.

Taking it nearer to the lamp, which the big man had lighted, and which now tilted crazily on its worn support, Carstairs broke the envelope.

"I'll read it through first; then ——" But he did not finish, for the single sheet fluttered heavily down from his hands to the table, and all of them could read:

"Carstairs, tell Greg and Ormsby I've gone after Fraser and Chadwell. Forgive me, all of you, for bringing it a peg closer. But I couldn't stand it any longer and I've gone to It."

"He's gone," Carstairs breathed at last. "I knew it."

No evidence of surprise. It had not been that to any of them.

"Easier for him, that way, of course," Bradbroke commented. "He might have stood it out!"

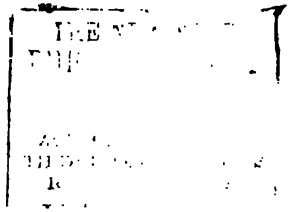
"I don't know," Carstairs took him up critically: "I think he wasn't so far wrong. It was his own affair. I mean we could hardly have expected him to stay on just for our sakes, when he felt *that* way." He nodded, and then shook his head a little. "I wonder where he is now; and if the spirit has to fly, alone, through infinity, until it lands up where it — belongs. Or I wonder if he's caught up with Fraser and Chadwell as soon as this; if they're talking it over. By Heaven ——" He broke off abruptly. "I say, do either of you chaps believe in *Hell?*" He nodded again, following that with the same, odd inclination of his head. "I don't know, personally,"

he explained, "I don't know, myself. But then," he supplemented, "how in hell *could* I? That's the point!" He was imputing his ignorance solely to his total lack of opportunity to learn. He nodded again, "*That's* the *point!*" He leaned over the bit of paper on which the singer had set down his confession of surrender. "I don't know how you chaps feel about this, but, personally, I believe he acted within his rights. For," his eyes sympathetic and sane again, "what had he to live for, I mean even before that cursed prophecy? What had he, after that girl sent him that picture? He hadn't even heard she was married, yet! What had he, then? What had any of us? Greg," almost appealingly, "*you* know! Bad enough before, it was. But *now!* A month ago, there were six of us, counting you in, Ormsby. Then, Jem out. Next Hugh Chadwell. Then, Brett, here. And *now*——"

The big man had gotten in the way of obstructing these pauses. He went slowly across to the speaker. "Yes, that's the way of it, old man; but what's the use of dwelling on it? None!" Taking the singer's note from the table, he held it down the lamp chimney until it burned, then dropped it into the single ash-receiver. No one spoke, as it writhed, and wrung itself into a blackened, decipherable crisp.

Then, he turned back to them: "There was no need of keeping it. We shan't forget what he said. And now, what we all need's some sort of a vacation, something to get this latest taste of this out of our mouths. Can't we catch a boat, off somewhere?" He looked from one to the other. "I've got it," he said, not letting them realize that they could suggest nothing, "we'll run down to the

"'*Tell Greg and Ormsby I've gone after Fraser and Chadwell*'"



Cape for a little change of scene, some new people, hit a theatre, and loaf a bit 'out-of-school,' generally. Then, after a few days we'll come back here and — take what's measured out for us."

Greg looked up at him almost insolently. "You speak as if there were some doubt of what we'll *get?*"

"I don't mean to," returned the big man. "I believe I feel as sure as you do. I'll even add that I don't feel any security in being alive another hour." He went to the door. "I'm going to telephone for the reservations and tickets for the boat, to-night. It's the best thing left I can think of. I'll have all the stuff ready; all either of you'll have to do is to pick up what you'll want for three days, and that won't be much. Then, get yourselves down to the Rennie dock at eleven forty-five. It's the *Inanda*, sails at midnight. I know, for I looked her up, expecting to take a run down there, before."

Greg nodded. "A vacation's what we need."

"If it'll *do* anything for us," said Carstairs.

"That's the point," Greg appended.

The big man turned back to them almost angrily: they were beginning to repeat themselves again, slipping off from what little steadiness he'd been able to inspire. Greg seemed the leader in this, too. Up to now, he had appeared stronger than Carstairs, less overpowered by the singer's leap into the ultimate. But now Greg's eyes were wistful; not wild; instead, infinitely sad. "Come, Greg, old man, and you, Carstairs," said the American, "we're going to stand this out side by side, wait till our time comes, do, with all that lies in us, what we know to be the best for — every one."

Greg started at the unlooked-for conclusion. "Yes," he said, with new intensity, "the best for every one!"

"And, one thing more," warned the big man: "let's not talk any more, for a while, about Paxton, or about this afternoon, there on the train. That's past and gone."

He walked to the doorway. "At the Rennie dock, remember," he called back over his big shoulder. He had reached his limit, and he knew it. And he kept his set face turned from them, as he repeated, "eleven forty-five."

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE RENNIE DOCK AT ELEVEN FORTY-FIVE

HE KNEW that he could rely on their keeping this promise. And he knew more: that neither of them suspected that he, too, had attempted flight; that, if they thought of it at all, it would be only to agree that he had seen them board the train, just as it had pulled out of Durban, and had come after them.

"And best that way," he said to himself, though without elation, almost without interest. In fact, it seemed very far back behind now. Everything, even Chadwell's death, seemed to have been thrust ages back by the singer's suicide.

And now what? The big man stopped his slow stride, to look about him in the thick darkness. He felt the sea air on his cheeks, the night wind sweeping in from the Indian Ocean. Yes, that was one answer: the ocean was there, waiting. Had the impatient singer gone to it, with the picture of the girl who had found she couldn't wait? The irony of it struck through him: *neither* of them had been able to wait; but, with the girl, it had been impatience of a sort how apart from that which had driven Paxton to his *death!*

The ocean, the ocean! Probably, the singer had gone that way, the surest as it was the simplest. And now,

where the tide had carried him, gently, he was sleeping his endless sleep.

He had walked blindly on, keeping the path he knew not how; and, suddenly, he stopped short, for the sound of a song, with the note of a subdued accompaniment, had awakened him. He breathed, staring about him, then caught his throat with his hands: He had not stopped too soon. An open gate was before him: It was the Netherbys'. Through the darkness, his heart had guided him to her!

He turned instantly. But too late. A white figure was approaching, and, his own drill snow white, his bulk loomed easily recognizable.

At least, so it was to her, and she came directly toward him.

"Mr. Ormsby!" Now, she was closer. And still approaching him.

He heard her only with difficulty, though he had kept his position, yes, gone a step toward her.

Then, his hand had gone out to her, for his will had surrendered to his heart.

"I had to see you," he heard himself saying. Should he never win back his self-control? "I had to come to you." His voice went from him. He felt her hand tighten, and realized, then, for the first time, what must have been her anguish at his clutch.

She made no effort to free herself; but she had fallen as silent as himself.

Their hands parted, his senses blind to all the world but her.

"What is it?" The voice, sudden, and full of fear,

was not hers but Anne's. "You don't mean ——? Not *Greg?*"

It recalled the sanity he fought for. "No," he achieved "not Greg." He hesitated, then turned half away from them; "but another terrible thing has come: Paxton has — gone." How grateful he was for remembering, even in that moment, to sustain the lie! He had almost said that the singer had killed himself. He went on: "Greg and Carstairs and I —— He'd left a note for us. It — we just found it. He'd been despondent ——" He remembered again, by a miracle. "His debts! And now he's gone."

"Oh — the poor fellow! The poor ——" It was the English violet, ending uncertainly. "I ——" She turned to Anne. "If only ——"

"Gone?" Anne demanded. "You don't mean he's committed ——"

He was glad of the protecting darkness. "He said nothing of where he was going. It was the way he was fixed here. And Chadwell's death, and Fraser's leaving! He ——"

"Chadwell?" That was all, the one word.

How could he have supposed that they had heard? He struggled to hold himself to naturalness or to something approaching that.

"We've just got the word: he was drowned while trying to rescue men imprisoned, by the water, in the Witwatersrand." He gave them no time for questions. "I'm — we're doing what we can. It hasn't been much. Greg and Carstairs and I've agreed to ——"

"What?" Anne demanded fiercely. "What?"

"They've got to be gotten away, for a little, from the scene of this, both of them. I'm taking them to-night to the Cape," he kept on, through Anne's sudden cry of negation. "Only two days. Then, I'll bring them back. Nothing can come to either of them while they're with me."

A hand caught his arm. "But *you?*" A voice said, close to his face. It was not Anne, who spoke now. "But *you!*"

A wave of gladness and grief swept over him. Automatically, his hand covered the small, true one which he loved. "I'll come back," he promised dully. "Good-bye." Then, though he heard her voice calling to him, above Anne's convulsive sobbing, he broke through the gate to the silent street.

"The dock," he heard himself saying aloud. "I've still time!"

Like a madman, he raced through the deserted darkness, a vast, white figure, with the face of a lost one, and sad, set eyes. On, through streets which the varied crowd of the day had left vacant; on and down, into the soft wind, the breath of the summoning, not distant sea. Until, after what had seemed interminable time to him, he reached the water-front and the place he sought.

Instantly, he won tickets and staterooms, one for Greg and Carstairs — he knew they would want to be together — and the other for himself. Then, out again to the dock-head, where he should be found the moment they should come. He glanced at his watch. It was eleven-fifty.

One minute, two, three, four. Then, a tall, slender

figure in white drill emerged from the path leading out from the warehouse, and he knew that Greg had come.

"Where's Carstairs?" the big man breathed, as Greg came up with him. "I thought he'd be with you."

Greg was looking about, through the darkness. "He said he'd get what he wanted, from his rooms, then come back for me, or, if he hadn't time, come straight here by himself. Where's your stuff? On board? Here's mine."

It was not much, but enough, and, in another moment, it had been given to a boy, with the number of the state-room into which it should be stowed.

"Good," said the big man, his eyes glued again to the entrance through which Carstairs must come. "He's probably on the way now. He knows the time." He glanced again at his watch.

"How much?" Greg asked, fearfully.

"Four minutes."

Greg swung toward the plank. "We'd best be getting on. Sure he's not somewhere on the boat? He knew the time."

"No, he's not here. I've looked over her. But he's got to come."

"Yes, he's got to," Greg echoed.

The American knew why Greg had repeated that "got to."

"You think" — Greg came closer — "you think he'll *come?*"

The words were drowned, with the big man s answer, by the splash of one of the stern lines. Then ,a bowline fell off; and the air was rent with whistles, warning ashore

those who had come on board to take leave of outbound passengers.

Two minutes gone. Three of the four. . . . And still no sign of Carstairs.

Greg caught the big man by the wrist. "I say, is it only because I want it so, or *is* there something moving, over there?" His voice ended in a nervous grasp. "Carstairs!" he called shrilly. "Carstairs!" He started violently as the very dock seemed to give before the impact of a vast body. He whirled, holding the other with both hands now. "In the name of God! what's that?"

And the big man steadied the boy, as he answered quietly:

"That was the *Inanda*, Greg. She's — gone." He gave him no time, and his groan no answer or recognition. "Come on back to my rooms," he said very distinctly and deliberately, looking away from him, for he knew what his words meant: that the steamer had sailed without them — that Carstairs had not come.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ONE THING LEFT TO DO

AS THEY left the dock, and came out upon the narrow boardwalk which connected the warehouse yard with the street sidewalk, it seemed to the big man that he had walked there, alone with Greg, before. He wondered, then stopped wondering. He gave up the riddle. There were so many, he had found, and not one with an answer, in South Africa.

"Just a moment, Greg," he warned as a motor whizzed by, giving him barely time to drag the other back.

"What," came Bradbroke's surprised question. "I say, Ormsby, what did you do that for?"

"Nothing," said the big man steadily.

They walked along without speaking. Under the first street-lamp, Greg pulled himself free from the American's guiding hand. "No need of that, you know," he objected, petulantly. "It's not as if I couldn't make it alone. I say, where's Carstairs?"

"He didn't come," said the American slowly.

Greg's stare was that almost of an inebriate. "You say he didn't ——?"

"He didn't come to the boat, didn't meet us. Come on. We're going to my rooms."

"Good!" Greg said, quite naturally. It was fairly late, his manner suggested, and they'd been off for a walk,

somewhere. "I'm dead-beat. That's the truth of it. I say, got an extra bed?"

"No, but the couch will muster with rugs and cushions."

"Right O! I'm dropping." Then, without warning, it came to him. The big man knew from the grip on his arm. "Ormsby, it means Carstairs——" He could not say it yet. "Ormsby, what are we going to do *now?*"

"We're going to my rooms, first," the American said. "No, *his first*, though I don't expect he's left any word."

It was but a dozen short blocks, and they made it, walking as men who felt, in their errand, only an idle interest. Greg had gathered himself, and now moved labouredly but without need of the big man's arm. Both were thinking of what they should agree to, of what would be the only thing *to* agree to, in the way of explanation, after they had found Carstairs' rooms void of him.

So that they were not surprised, after they had swung Carstairs' door in. He had left no word, no note, as Chadwell and Paxton had. But there was a trunk, locked, with a key on the top of it; some small things, hurriedly done up, as if Carstairs had been afraid they might come before he had finished: a small package of books, addressed to Bradbroke; some hunting prints, good ones, stacked in a corner, addressed to the American. There was no telling or guessing when Carstairs had stripped his walls; but it must have been some time back, for the writing on the tag was in ink, and the words, "For Ormsby," had been written in a steady hand.

Greg stared at it. "Gad, he kept it to himself well! He must have expected to go any time, even before he

knew about Paxton. Good nerve, I say, not to show it! And, next to poor Brett, I'd thought him the shakiest of the six!" He looked suddenly over his shoulder into the darkness, as if awaiting the listening wraith of Carstairs.

And the big man nodded. "Yes, he had good stuff in him. Now, Greg, let's get out of here. No," as Bradbroke lifted the lamp and looked again about him, "we've seen all there is, and waiting around won't help. He felt that he had a right to go. You remember what he said of Paxton? That he'd acted only within his rights?" He spoke very simply, watching Bradbroke guardedly. Expecting the other's collapse now at any moment, he steadied him in every way he could. "Come, old man. We'll go to my rooms, for they're handy, and they'll do for us both, to-night." If he could once get Greg there . . .

He succeeded. But once there, Greg threw himself face downward on the couch, all his resistance gone. And the big man, realizing this, said nothing, but filled his pipe with the Boer tobacco, which Hackluyt had never designed for such an hour as this, and clothed his strong face with a mask of smoke.

Through the drift of the smoke-cloud, he scanned Greg's spent, graceful figure. He had done right to bring Greg here. He knotted his hands. They were big-boned and resolute. He might be able to stand the waiting, to fight it through till the End came; but Greg could not have endured by himself. Greg had to be helped out. Had it not been Decreed, the big man asked himself, that he should supplant Greg's weakness out of his physical plenitude? Impossible? Yes, of course.

But why heed that, since everything about him, now, was impossible? Everything near and dear to him, all that would have fed his heart! On the other hand, there were no longer such things as impossibilities: he could credit *any*thing now — anything short of his escape from the curse which was working its way so effectively. Yes, it *had* been Decreed that he should help Greg's lack with his own plenitude. This Impossible, like all the rest, had become Inevitable. He was destined to give, and Greg was destined to receive from him. And what a return Greg had made! Greg had found him safe, happy, and care-free; if Greg had kept out of his life, he would never have known Durban; long before this, he would have sickened of those golden geysers at Kimberley and taken the first boat home. Greg had stepped in and spoiled everything in the world for him, ruined him, wrecked him, killed him by bringing him to Durban; however unable Greg had been to read the future. . . .

Then, in the last fraction of a second before his strong hands had completed their journey, habit saved the American: his eyes had gone to the window, found their direction, told him that *she was there.* Cautiously, he interposed a rug between Greg and the night wind, turned the lamp slowly down, then extinguished it. Then, with a tread so light that it could not disturb the sleeper, the big man found his bed.

CHAPTER XIX

IN RECOGNITION OF THE TRUTH

MORNING had flared up out of the Indian Ocean. The American lay motionless but unsleeping, as he had lain through the night, unable to divorce, from his restless brain, what had prostrated the younger and weaker man. Seeing Greg rouse, the big man nodded.

"Glad you're awake. I thought you never would."

"I wish ——" Bradbroke began, then broke off suddenly. "Is it true, Ormsby? Has Carstairs gone out, too?"

"Yes, it's still true, Greg. He went out of this world last night. You and I are all that's left, and we've got to face it." He stopped, and turned his eyes from the younger man, rose, walked slowly to the window, and stood looking out dully. He was giving Greg time to gather what was left of his sanity and strength; he was asking himself how best to begin what he knew he must now make clear: this plan of his, which Greg would first revolt from, yet must inevitably accept. He turned back, for the thing had to be done, and he'd best be doing it.

"There's no good in asking ourselves why this thing had to come to us. All we shall ever know is that it was laid out for us, scheduled. Of course Jem Fraser

went so quick he didn't get the first hint of it; but it was clear enough to Chadwell; they said, up there at the mine, that he seemed downright anxious to be down where the water was; 'as if,' and I'm quoting the superintendent's own words, 'Chadwell knew it was going to give him relief!' You'll agree with me there's something significent and terrible about that: I mean, *he felt what was coming.* Even then, though he wasn't imaginative like Brett or even poor Carstairs, he'd looked ahead and It had caught his eyes to the point of fascination, obsession, derangement, call it what you will. He was intellectual, self-sufficient; over thirty years of individual experience had toughened his power of resistance; he was one of the most doggedly self-controlled men that I have ever known; yet It caught him, made him fast, and drew him; left him not a free agent, did Its will on him! Its claiming Brett Paxton and Carstairs was only a bagatelle for It, after It had taken *him!* Furthermore, there was the psyschological effect, of his taking, on Paxton and Carstairs! That clinched It, stopped any doubt they had left, took their hope. Already lacking Chadwell's power of resistance, they straightway lost power to *try.* All the worst sides of their life here haunted them; their memory of their knocks put them still lower; they'd no ties to resort to; owed every one; could never get back; might be called by It any moment; asked themselves what they had to live for; what the use was of struggling. I say, they must have figured it out so!"

"What if they did?" Greg broke in bitterly impatient. "It would have got them *any*way!"

"I know that," the big man admitted; "but what I'm coming to ——"

"For God's sake *reach* it! What *are* you coming to?"

"To the fact that, though It would have hit them anyway, they made It come sooner by doing what they did."

Greg laughed in reckless derision. "How much longer do you fancy they'd have lived? And, even supposing you're right in your crazy theory, what has it to do with *us*?"

"This," said the big man: "There's going to be no morbid wooing of Death in *your* case: you're going to stay here with me."

"*Live* with you?"

"Exactly that. Not as a prisoner. Don't glare so, or misunderstand my motive. It's for our common safety: I'm going to take care of you so that *you'll* take care of *me*."

"But my work! I mean at the consulate. Every pound I get comes from there!"

"I know that, and I've taken measures to meet it."

Greg wheeled on him, as if struck. "By heaven, Ormsby, this is too much! I know we're both doomed. But this ——" His face had set. He had half risen, as if, in his wild rage, he were about to hurl himself at the other vast and powerful as he was. Then, his shoulders slumped, his strength sapped, instead of built up, by his passion. He sank weakly back, though his eyes did not waver.

"You can't think ——?"

"Yet I do think," the big man went on implacably, "for I know it's the only thing to do. Don't glare at me, I tell you. There's nothing else for us. Call it your safety and Miss Netherby's. Yes, I know I ought not to have said that, but you made me. It's this way: if you go on, as you did in the old life, your poverty and powerlessness'll be close to you as your skin, and you'll be as morbid and black-melancholy as Carstairs and Paxton were. You'll not be giving yourself a chance!"

"Chance?" Bradbroke echoed. "Can you still speak of the thing as 'chance'? "

"Yes, because, for my own sanity, I must," said the big man. "Call it a delusion, if you will, and I won't contradict you. But, having said that, hear me out. I'm going to have you here with me. I'm going to look after you. You'll never go to the consulate again, except, perhaps, as a guest at a dinner. I'll double what salary you'd ever have got there in a thousand years. For God's sake, get that look off your face: all any one'll ever know is that you and I are partners!"

"Partners!" Greg broke in; "partners in the most cursed partnership that was ever held!"

"Right," the big man admitted; "but I mean the business I'll open in Durban to-day: you and I are going to speculate in Australian wools. Don't look so incredulous, or think it won't look all right! It will. I'll be ample protection. Durban 'll *expect* you to make money, for you'll be associated with me, the 'Human Mint,' the 'Money Making Machine.'" He spun the nicknames off

without bitterness, for he was past bitterness for such trivialities.

"About the salary: it'll be, in your money, £50 a month."

"A *month?*" The words came in spite of him.

"Only that at first, for you won't be worth more, not knowing the business. But you'll catch on in no time. I'll coach you, for I'll need your help just as soon as you *can* help. Then, I'll pay you more and more. Now you'd better go over and tell the Netherbys."

At the words, Bradbroke turned on him. "You think I can lie to ——"

"Lie?" the big man interrupted! "Haven't we passed that, Greg?"

"Not to *her*," Bradbroke broke out. "I'd rather *go* to Jem and Brett Paxton and Chadwell and Carstairs. Yes, and she'd rather I would than have us both in pay to *you!*"

"Ask her, and see what she says. No, Greg," as the boy turned away, "don't take it like this. It's the only thing left for us. Tell her the lie of our partnership, if it's a lie to you, and don't be hurt by her happiness. She's only a girl, and you know how much happiness anything in this world can give her after It has come to *you?*" He waited, then went on: "Tell her, and let her be glad while she can be. You've told me what these years have been to both of you."

For a long moment Bradbroke leaned back on the table, seemingly lifeless. Then he slowly inclined his head. "We'll tell them, then. As you say — they'll be glad to — know."

But the big man shook his head absently. Suddenly a great weariness had come on him.

"No, Greg, I'm not — going."

Greg hesitated, then went to the doorway. "I'll be back when I get through."

Then he went slowly down the stairs.

CHAPTER XX

IMPORTERS AND EXPORTERS OF AUSTRALIAN WOOLS

OVERCOME as he was with that sudden weariness, he felt that it must be bedtime; yet his watch, which he found himself staring at, gave him swift denial. But his limbs were lead, and, for the first time in his life, he undressed by daylight and went to bed. He must sleep! Madness lay in wakefulness!

For what seemed a very long time to him, he lay wide-eyed in the darkness, induced by his exclusion of the day and his sealing of his lids. Sleep seemed world-wide from him. He could hear Greg saying to the Netherbys, "I've got something big to tell you: something's happened!"

And they would beg him to tell it. Then, Greg would tell.

That was the way it was going to be. To the big man, picturing it out, it seemed very simple, almost childish. But his hands locked. Could Greg make his deception plausible? Yes, for it required but poor acting to deceive, with a lie of good news, people so hungry for good news. And Greg could act. Greg could *act!* He had never seen Greg's equal in private theatricals. That was one piece of good luck, anyway: Greg could make

it look like the real thing. Greg would get it *over*. But if only *he* could *sleep!*

He moved on the bed. How tense he was! He felt his arms and legs, doing it cautiously in order not to surprise them into hiding their real and blameworthy condition. And his caution served: he had surprised them: they were as hard as wood. He sat up, and shook his head: this wouldn't do! It wouldn't do at all! He must relax them. No one could sleep like that! He remembered how Sterret, the old 'varsity coach, had come into their rooms in freshman year, at Red Top, and warned them, one night, to relax, and showed them how. Good, old, big-hearted, cranky Sterret! What blessed days those had been, and what a dear old chap Sterret was! He'd seen him, not six months back, not three, by heaven! in Boston. Sterret had been in '84, may even have been before *that*, but he was such a corker and had kept himself so fit he didn't look half as old as that!

He'd relax, let his muscles go flabby. That was better. Even if Greg never showed up again, didn't come back at all, and the Thing hit him right off, it didn't matter much. Probably, Greg would not come back. He thought he could see Greg telling about the partnership until the crack of Doom, to the Netherbys. Greg would keep on, and never get through, never come back, and the Thing would hit *him* before it crashed on Greg. But that didn't matter either. For he'd found her, and loved her, and lost her. She was an English violet. He'd seen that at once! Sweet, shy, gentle, and innocent! There had been a song, where a man had boasted that the girl he loved was like a red, red rose. How could a

man do that? *She* was like an *English violet.* And he was very grateful for it. There was such a world of difference! He had been afraid of frightening her, and the fear had been to him a glory all his own. That first evening, and the next time he had seen her; and the next, and every one of them. How wonderful she was! If only once he could have told her —— He must never see her again, but he had touched her hand. . . .

A hand fell on his shoulder. Greg was bending over him, with a white and frightened face.

"Ormsby!" he cried out. "Ormsby, forgive me?" he begged. "I swear you were *smiling* as you slept."

"Slept?" The big man was looking about him.

"Yes," Greg said. "It's four o'clock."

The American heard, then let his head fall back. "Why did you wake me? For I've dreamed as no man has ever dreamed."

"Dreamed?" The boy, sitting on the side of the bed, waited, wondering.

For the big-boned face had lost the lines which had aged it; its steady tones had come back; the cheeks had filled again; the deep eyes were marvellously, incredibly clear in their glance. So might a man look, who never in his life had once been tired.

Greg nodded, unconvinced, yet believing. "I suppose it's your 'condition,' always exercising," he said slowly, trying to square his thin shoulders; "but ——" His shoulders sagged again. "I don't know."

And the big man turned half away from him, to hide his lasting gratitude for the blessed, healing glory of his Dream.

"You'd best dress," Bradbroke said at last. However altered the other was, Greg's face was still white and haggard. "You'd best get up, I think."

"Yes, I've got to get downtown, and set them working on the offices." The big man was clear of the bed while he spoke.

"It's not that," Bradbroke replied, absently. "They're coming for us, in half an hour, with the gharry." He glanced at his watch. "In twenty-five minutes. Anne made me," he said. He had parted the curtains, but kept oddly away from the light. "Said she'd got to see you. So did Miss Langmaid. She was the first to talk of it. I —— What could I do, Ormsby? Anne — all of them. They think the world's made over new. Don't you *see?*"

The big man stopped his towel in mid swing. "The partnership, you mean?"

"No, the fifty a month." The boy let himself slowly down on the bed.

Fifty pounds a month! Had Greg been so in need that they meant that to him? Fifty pounds a month! Their prospect told what their lack had been, the ineffectiveness of his struggles; only South Africa for him, never again England; and, through all, and in all, the building bitterness of her who should have been his comforter, but was to him and to those others, whose lives touched hers, ever and only what the big man had seen her . . . *an uneasy factor in South Africa!*

"Greg," said the big man, when at last he stood dressed, "can't you let me out of this?"

Bradbroke hauled himself to his feet. "No," he said. "Come! There's the carriage now."

He was right. Anne's laughter came clearly, musically.

"Come down, you truants! We're not in the least patient!"

"Coming," Greg called from the window. "Ormsby," he whispered so sibillantly that the big man warned with a gesture, "you've got to do the talking, remember. I was awake when you put that rug over me last night. I've been awake for forty hours, and you've slept and dreamed for six."

Then they went down the stairs to the carriage, which waited them in the reeling street.

He had told himself that he must not so much as think of her, and, as for seeing her — he hoped that he'd some honour left! Yet, he entered the carriage, and took the seat by her as if the gharry had been theirs alone. More than that, he seemed to have gone back from the world of the Unreal to the Real. It was as it had been on that first evening. All was safe and sane again. For the sight of her, her brief handclasp, the kindliness in her eyes — she had watched him as he turned to Anne for a moment — blest and steadied him. She did more even than that: her dearness endeared the whole world to him healed his soul.

And that was only the beginning. For, as he talked with her, it was with a new and very sacred confidence. From time to time, he even turned from her, as if revelling in the strange peace which had come to him. It was as if his old fear that she might, after all, prove evanescent, had forever gone. She was here with him. She would be here always. The world might wag as it would. It

could not effect them, could not take her away from him: *she was his.* Yes, she was his. *For his dream had come back, that glorious, marvellous dream, in which Heaven had showed him their marriage, her his wife!* Was this only a new form of madness. He wondered, but idly. After all, why should he try, or care, to plumb it? Was it not enough that it had been vouchsafed to him? For it had been. This peace, which passed all understanding, this soul-stirring rapture, could have been brought by nothing else! He had heard a very few men, the best and happiest he knew, tell of it reverently: let come what might, death itself the next instant, *they had been married!* So each had spoken, whose marriage had brought utter happiness.

Yes, she was his. The restlessness of his bachelor days, days begun with such elation of independence, were over. Suddenly, all had changed. The world was very good to him. Before, he had thought it good; but, then, he had not known. Before, he had driven time, had tried to catch up with it. Now, the days should be held back. Together, they'd hold them back. That was it: they'd do it together. Always together. That was all of everything! He smiled through the mist his joy brought to his eyes. In his rapture, his hand covered hers, and he said:

"Thank God for it all!" His hand brought hers to his lips. Then, he buried his face in shaking hands, for she was saying:

"You have done what you promised: you have given them their happiness!"

She had turned toward him, and the violet eyes held

him, blinded him with their utter absence of reserve. She allowed him the perfect vision: the violet eyes were wet. "They will be *married* and go back in a few months, Anne says —— "

He felt the universe tilting.

"And now, if you two have quite gotten through, perhaps you'll begin, Mr. Ormsby?" laughed Anne.

CHAPTER XXI

WHERE THE TRUTH HAD NO PLACE

YES?" he asked, grateful that what he should say could be in reply to Anne.

"I want to know about it, all about it," explained Miss Netherby. "Tell me everything you've been telling Marian. It means that, to be happy, you've got to work?"

"Yes," he said with an effort, though she was helping him, and he knew it. "Frankly stated, it means that."

"And you're not content to let Greg idle, either!" She shook her head in mock martyrdom. "Poor Greg, I can see just what you'll make of him! But, do please transform him gradually, and then only part way, for I like him so much as he is."

It was the girlish — not the bitter — Anne, now, and the big man smiled, "I promise," praying that he achieved verisimilitude.

"But you're not telling me any more than he did," she objected. "When are you going to begin?"

"At once. I've practically decided on the offices. It will take a little time getting them up, but not long. As far as I have been able to find, Australian wools have never been tried here on anything but a very small scale. We'll make a go of it." He had kept on automatically, after

one glance had told him that Bradbroke could not be looked to for any sort of assistance.

"You'll buy and sell?" Evidently, that was as far as Greg had gone, or been able to go, with the story. Miss Netherby hesitated.

"Where we can get the best market," the American came to her rescue. "England, France, Canada, Germany, America. Anywhere. As a matter of fact, I don't know a thing about this market yet, myself."

"Oh, but you will," Anne assured him. "And you're going to have Greg *live* with you?"

He nodded. "We've talked of it, ever since we lived together in my sheet-iron shack at Kimberley. And, now I've so much more space than I need in my rooms here, he's going to take pity on my loneliness."

He knew that her happiness blinded her, but he felt that even she must see what heavy work he was making of her simple question, and he shut his lips doggedly.

"But you must have decided all this very suddenly?"

"Yes. Yes. I imagine that we did." Wouldn't she ever be satisfied, he asked himself. And wouldn't Greg ever help him?

He saw that she was smiling, and welcomed it as an answer to his prayer. Then, her smile faded. "Last night"— she remembered suddenly —"why, only last night, you two and Carstairs were going off for a vacation to the Cape." Her face whitened to a shade ghastly in comparison to her former radiance. "Greg," she demanded hoarsely, "did Brett really ——?"

Greg braced himself. The big man saw him, but could not avoid Anne's harassing eyes. "Yes, Miss

Netherby, he's gone. I — he left a note. It seems he'd had it in mind for a long time. Got away down, discouraged, you know. Greg will tell you." He'd force Greg to speak!

"I wish you wouldn't, Anne," Bradbroke said desperately. "It's as Ormsby says: there was a note left. Ormsby burned it — afterward; but we all saw it, Ormsby and Carstairs and I. I don't know what means he took, of course. Wasn't a trace. But he undoubtedly made sure."

"The poor fellow! The poor, poor boy!"

The same words she had used in the darkness, last night, at the gate. The same deep, simply-confessed sorrow, so much more telling than Anne's verbal grief. "There's no way we could find him? It seems so terrible to think of his being found by any one but his *friends*."

The big man looked straight before him, "Yes, it is terrible," he said.

"But, Greg," Anne was saying, half-hysterically, "what can be done? This is the third in — why, hardly a month! First, poor little Jem, then Hugh, and now Brett! It's too ——" She tensed her fingers on Greg's, as she went on, to the big man: "Right here in this little set of us, almost as if they —— You don't think each *knew* the other was going?" Her words piled on each other. "You don't think *that?*" Her hand tightened almost to the point of pain.

"No," the American reassured her. "Not the least chance of *that!* If they had, they'd have told me. I'd have known."

"And, anyway, *I* would," Greg hurried in with. "You know how close we were? Then, too, Fraser's was something about his heart. I don't know just what; but I'm practically sure of it. I didn't say so, not even to Hammerstone."

"Doctor Hammerstone?" Anne demanded wildly. "I didn't know that Hammerstone ——"

The American set his teeth.

Greg breathed audibly. "I don't mean that. I mean Hammerstone had looked Jem over, when he first came out. This isn't known, generally. I have your word?" He swept them with stern, hard eyes. "Beg your pardon, all 'round, of course, but had to make sure. Not a word of it must get out. But Jem did have a weak heart, and probably that ——"

"Of course," interposed the big man. If Greg would not stop of his own choice, he must be ridden off from his topic for he was heaping one bit of damaging evidence on another.

"Of course. I supposed, though, that that was generally known. It took his courage, drove him away from here, from the people who knew him, made him a wanderer. Heaven help the poor, mistaken lad. Chadwell's case was different, and much clearer, in a way: sheer, fatal heroism."

Greg was still looking straight before him, as he had been doing when the American had cut him off in midspring. But his face showed his relief. "Fatal heroism," he said. "Just that!"

"But Brett," Anne began again; "you haven't said about *him*."

Ormsby leaned swiftly closer to the girl at his side:

"Speak to her, please. Anything you can to distract her or reassure her. If she could be persuaded to go home, I mean her own home, here ——"

He was doing his best at naturalness; but fear held him, his fear that, in the next breath, Anne would ask about *Carstairs!*

The eyes into which he looked did not waver, though the violet deepened, and the rare colour failed in the perfect face. Then, she laid her hand on one of Anne's bent shoulders.

"Anne," she said, gently, "I'm quite tired out. Will you let Greg drive us home?"

At her words, Greg threw the horses about. "By Jove!" he said, with a laugh at which the big man marvelled and blest him, "we've all of us earned a vacation, and, if not that, tea. And, remember, Anne, I'm no longer an idler. From now on, I'm a money-making machine."

After that beginning, Greg did not falter. Through the drive back, he allowed hardly a word from any one of them. Something, genius, almost, the big man thought, inspired his rapid sallies. The talk ran away and away and still farther away from Jem and Chadwell and the singer and Carstairs.

Nor did he once mention England. It was all South Africa, as on that first evening. So that, before they had entered the long drive, which wound in and out among the amatingula hedges, the big man's fear had gone. Of course, he could not undeceive the girl at his side: he must let her go on drawing all the joy she could from her

thought of Anne's nearing marriage. But Anne and Greg could never marry, now. Not after this, not after the proven effectiveness of the prophecy! It was not to be thought of. And Greg would know it. He was too loyal to Anne, loved her too much, to marry after *this*. It would be woe to him to hear what, in the natural course of events, Anne would soon begin to say of their marriage. But the boy would stand firm.

The conviction clung to him, as they entered the house, and his eyes followed Greg, who, acting under habit, was preparing the tea himself. Again and again, he applauded Bradbroke's courage, his nerve-control, his power of dissimulation. At the moment, Greg was arguing a triviality with Anne, and the girl's smile — she was quite restored now — was not more radiant than the man's. And the big man, studying them, wondered how many men, out of all that he knew, could smile that way, in that presence, faced by one one-hundredth part of what confronted Greg.

"Not one," said the big man to himself. "Not *one!*"

He rose from his chair, to join them, wondering if she were not soon coming down again, and still praying that no one remembered to ask, or to suggest sending, for Carstairs.

She came. The Netherbys had not too many servants. She had been making coffee. He wondered how she had realized, or, realizing, remembered at such a time that, American that he was, he preferred it to the English tea. He set it down as another of her wonders.

"Mr. Ormsby," her voice was saying, "you look as you did there, last night, at the gate. Won't you let

me ——?" Unconsciously her hand had gone out. How frank and true she was! That he was deceiving her, must continue to cut him with a keenness all its own. He rose to his feet, his eyes on that small, soft hand.

"If I could tell you ——" Her wonderful eyes held him. "If ever I can ——" he said dully. Then, "If I stay here, I shall do what I must not do."

"When you can, you will tell me?" Her voice was the lowest whisper.

"When I can." He took her hand for one moment. For one moment, looked down at her. Then, after a word with Greg and Anne, he went down the steps.

"To the offices," he had thrown back over his shoulder. But, though he had spoken to Greg, his eyes had gone to Her, to the hand which she raised to him — the hand which he had kissed.

CHAPTER XXII

THE VICTOR AND THE SPOILS

IT WAS done. Right or wrong, it was done, he told himself as he descended the drive and came out upon the street. Having owned the partnership, neither he nor Greg could draw back. They were committed to it and to its results. The offices, now, and to buy up the best buyer in Natal! The engagement of the market would not be difficult for him. Markets were old friends of his.

He got the offices and the buyer. Money would do much in Durban, and an abundance worked miracles. Buyer and offices were ready for the big man by the middle of the week. And, by Thursday morning, he was at his desk, cabling, and sending telegrams. He was busy again, and that meant rest to him, since occupation was always rest to his restless yet unhurried mind. He was back in the harness. As much as he ever could have, again, he had his old point-of-view back. And sometimes — yes, for as much as half an hour at a stretch — he could keep his thoughts excludingly on his work. And if, at the end of that half hour, an oval face, rare, and wonderful to him, smiled up at him from the pages or papers he studied, it was only to smile her approval of the course which he had made his own.

He marvelled at the clearness with which he visualized her. Sometimes, in these moments of hallowed, uninfringed communion, he felt her so near that he dared hardly admit his earlier thoughts. Then, he would seize his pen, or bend lower over his tables and lists, waiting for the time when she should come again. She would come. No matter where the Fates drove him as Its plaything, she would come to him, up to, yes, and through, the last moment that he should live.

And if, at other times, his eyes saw the white face of young Jem Fraser, his limp body swung in the strong arms of impassive Hammerstone, Hugh Chadwell, grave, self-contained and sombre, as on the evening of that last rehearsal, the last evening that any of them had seen him alive, their faces, and that of the rag-nerved singer, and Carstairs', with desperation hidden with greater skill, he met their stares calmly, for, already, he held himself one with them.

Only one of the spirits which visited him seemed unaware of him, and that the dark Fiend who had pronounced his doom. The half-human face and form of the barbaric prophet! Where was he now? Had he gone back, for a period, to the Shades which had sired him? Did he still live? Had he *ever* lived? Had not his deadly prophecy been the *dictum* of the *dead*? The big man faced him, but felt his blood chill at that aspect. Yes, the cloud had not lifted; the curse was on him, more heavily with every hour. Now, he expected no peace from it, just as, long ago, he had abandoned hope that it might pass from him. And he was very glad that, since it was unescapable, it was omnipresent. He required

that continuous reminder for the controlling of his heart and the leashing of his tongue.

And so it was with him. Day in, day out, he went to his offices on West Street. Day in, day out, he communed with Her there, and faced the others manfully. Each night Greg went with him to the rooms which now seemed to have been theirs always. But, though soon adapted again to the Regent, they never stayed long there: the quiet rooms of the big man, where Hackluyt and Hammerstone came not, were more acceptable.

More often, they went to the Netherbys', Greg always to talk with his fiancée, and the big man as naturally to go to the girl whom he held barred from him as by a barrier aged a thousand years.

She comprehended his muteness at least sufficiently to accept his long silences. And he marvelled at this. It was well that she could do this, for he could do nothing in the way of either explanation or apology. He told himself that she understood him, and that he understood her. Undoubtedly, he meant by that that they were congenial, and that he was finding her more than ever perfect. It is probable that she confessed to herself the same thoughts of him — at least, touching their congeniality. Neither knew how much closer together they were coming. Neither, before, had known what it was to love.

At times, he would tell her of his new business, of the progress Greg was making. He spoke, with all the enthusiasm of which he was capable, of the work of Greg. The truth of it was, he was trying to disabuse himself of a growing conviction that he had ill-read Bradbroke —

and he was having very hard work with it. He was trying to persuade himself that he found Greg as tractable as ever; that Greg was doing his best; that Greg was meeting him halfway! And, for all his trying, he had begun to see that Greg was conceited, petulant, no longer boyish, but childish; that Greg was not a magnetic man, the least likable of the five. Greg came less and less to the offices. . . . He had been but a silent partner at best. *Now*, he was fast becoming an absent one. Moreover, the fact of the fifty pounds a month had begun to rankle — not the amount: it still loomed huge to him, but the *fact* of it.

"You're just keeping me on, Ormsby," he would fling out, after the big man had patiently rectified some one of his glaring errors. "I'm no help to you, worse than none!" Then, he would brood by the hour, after the manner learned from Anne, by his gloomy silences drawing closer the spectres which already haunted the high-walled rooms.

And, though not denying what Bradbroke said of his business blindness, the big man would remind him that, after all, the partnership was only a means, a trick.

"So what do we care whether or not we make money by it? And, even so, we're making it. I admit it's sheer luck"— he really believed it —"but we're scoring steadily. This," holding out a cable which had just come, "means fifty thousand if it means a cent. Hooper & Sons, London. You know: biggest importers of them all! And this is only a feeler: they're trying us out. If we hit them right with this, they'll double this order inside another month. Gad, Greg, our filling

with the only grade they were short on, was sheer Providence!"

"Providence!" Greg burst out. "*We* favoured by Providence! I tell you, it's all right for *you:* you've a *right* to the money. You earn it! All I do is cash your checks! How would you feel in my place? You're all they talk of, now: how you're teaching me your ways; how sure you are, and how sure I'll be! All of 'em, even Miss Langmaid, are pleased as if I were their baby and you were teaching me to read or walk! By Heaven! I wish I were back at the consulate!"

He had cried that out before, but never with such appeal as now. And the American saw rebellion forming in the handsome eyes.

"Back at the consulate!" No, he wouldn't allow *that!* They were sitting alone in the big man's private office and he turned slowly 'round. "I don't know, after all, that your position's so unreasonable. I see what you mean, Greg, and I guess I'd feel the same way, if our positions were reversed. Yes, it would sting me to cash your checks."

Greg leaned toward him, across the corner of the desk on which he'd been resting his laxed arms. "Then let me out of this! Let me go, get back!"

"And the Netherbys? Have you thought of them? They know you've got the first real chance you ever had in your life and they'll wonder. Of course, it's your own affair, but it'll be one thing more that can't be explained."

Greg's lips opened, then closed. Perhaps it was the big man's impassiveness, his square-built, impervious

bulk, his tremendous reach and spread, which checked Bradbroke.

"Stick along with me," the big man went on. "We've been going only a month with the business, but that's as long as the Thing took to dispose of Fraser and Chadwell and Brett Paxton and Carstairs, and It hasn't got us *yet*. So stick along, I say! Since the checks hurt you, I'm going to cut them off. I'm not drawing any salary myself, and I don't see why *you* should. From now on, we'll stand on the partnership division alone. Here's your half of what we cleaned up on that deal with Hooper & Sons." He shoved the amount across to Greg.

Greg glared at it. It was twenty-five thousand pounds.

"And now," the big man went on, "instead of coming down here any old time, and mooning around like a wild man, try to learn this business. In plain English, get down to work! All you've done so far is lie down. You've not even *tried!*"

Greg sprang up. This was rage. No longer that strange look of remorse.

"Oh, stop acting, and get down to work! For one thing keep office hours!"

"Acting? You say I've been *acting?*" Greg was livid.

"Of course! Acting the part of the young man who had nothing to live for, doing it unconsciously. But you *have* got something to live for: as long as this Thing holds off, you've got a partnership half of a business that has just brought you in twenty-five thousand pounds, and will bring you a lot more, if you'll tend the shop." The big man spoke more quietly now: he had won his point; stunned Greg with the amount of his winnings, taken

from his mind all thought of retreating into the consulate. He went on,

"Now, you acrobat, pick up that stuff and come over to the bank with me, and deposit yours while I stick mine in. Then, having had our row, and made peace, we'll have a drink and a smoke." He stuck his pipe into his pocket, as he got up, filling it there, with the Boer tobacco, "strong and loose and dry."

It swung Greg. The bank. Then, the drink and the smoke.

"Now, run over to the Netherbys', and tell them, and let them fill you up with tea so you won't be worth anything for the rest of the day. Take the afternoon off. I'd like to, but I've got a dozen things here to do."

Greg shook his head obstinately. "No, I'll stay here and help. I say, Ormsby, do you really think I've got it in me to amount to anything in this?" His arm took in the offices.

"You bet I do," lied the big man instantly. "All you need is experience."

And it was not until an hour later, that they both set out for the Netherbys', Greg buoyant — it was always one extreme or the other, with him — and the big man quiet, saying over and over to himself: "It was the only way to cheer him up, and I don't really believe he has any idea of marrying her."

But he kept his eyes straight before him. The point had been gotten by, but for how long? How long could he keep Greg alive, how long hold him back from what had already taken the other four? He had a tremendous fortune, by this time: Falk kept reporting the same

phenomenal winnings from Kimberley; Cheever, back in New York, cabled the same of the Street there, and Boyden & Lawrence did the same thing from the Boston end. How he'd like to see Dave Lawrence now! There'd never been another lad like him: the same old Dave! What a second tenor he'd sung on their quartette, and what a seven he'd been in the crew! Gad, it would be good to see him — would have been if only things had broken right. The thought of the Bostonian, the frankest, most downright, thoroughly genuine man that he could remember out of all his generation — except, of course, Tom — had made him forget that he was scoring on Australian wools, too. Yes, he was scoring on Australian wools, too! But the old question hung: what was going to be the end of it?

"There they all are!" Greg cried out, as they climbed the drive, and turned the last bend in it. "It'll be great news for them!"

"Yes," said the big man, following the direction of Greg's eyes, "there she is."

Then he locked his lips.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE DIRECTION OF THE TRUTH

SHE was waiting at the steps' top, never before so rarely lovely, never so utter a blessing to his weary brain and eyes. So that his bow to Anne was even more brief than usual, a thing which Anne realized, for a smile danced to the edge of her curving lips. In truth, the big man's attitude toward her guest delighted Anne now even more than before. Then, she turned to Greg again, leaving the big man and the girl to themselves.

She looked accusingly at him. "Something is the matter, but you don't tell me what it is — just let me see its effect on you! And," she went on, with her characteristic honesty and direct friendliness, "I don't think it's very nice of you."

Suddenly, his eyes had caught hers. For only an instant, then he looked away.

Without knowing why, she coloured to the soft curls which framed the "widow's peak." Then, "I'm sorry I said that," she faltered: "I didn't mean it to sound that way. Please believe that. You have always been ——" Her eyes, deep and wonderfully clear, did not waver. A moment before, she had coloured hotly. Now, she as slowly paled. "And so it hurts me to see you troubled."

He looked down at her. "For all the world and the

hereafter, I wouldn't have you hurt, or know what being hurt is. But, without having merited it, or earned it, I believe, I have met with great trouble."

"With Greg? I'm so sorry, so deeply sorry." Her eyes were full of pain.

He sank back into the chair from which he had half-risen.

"Yes," he said, "with Greg."

All unconsciously, she had saved him an open confession of what she had come to be to him. And he knew that, to continue in the direction she had given, was the one safe thing for him to do, for the pauses which he so longed to fill with the fact of that love for her, were breaking him. "I mean," he forced out, "Greg will soon stop coming to the office at this rate. I mean that he's morbid, melancholy; he gets 'down.'"

She told him. "Why of course: with all this — I mean these terrible things: Jem Fraser, and Mr. Chadwell, and Mr. Paxton, and now Mr. Carstairs!"

So she knew of Carstairs, had heard the rumour, that is, that Carstairs had "bolted the country," as Fraser did. The simplicity and control with which she showed him her knowledge, showed him how used she was becoming to South Africa. He marvelled at it, and it hurt him. It was another thing which he should hold against South Africa. He knew that she could never be like Anne, and he thanked God that she was too gentle ever to approach, by so much as a hair's breadth, the point-of-view of Catherine Hetheridge, even Catherine Hetheridge, before she had first begun to respond to South Africa, that younger Catherine, who then had not ceased hoping,

who had not so much as dreamed of the coming service with Madame Zelig, the Jewess, or of marriage with Beaconsfield Zelig, the Jew. But he was glad of whatever kept Catherine from cultivating any intimacy with her. They never met, now. The rehearsals had stopped: all idea of offering the play had been abandoned at Chadwell's death. All in two months! *Could* it still be only two months since Greg had led him southward into Natal? Only two months since that night he had met her, at the Regent, and poor Brett had tried to sing "Mandalay," and that vagabond in the street had claimed them as brothers and sisters in exile? Only two months since he and this slender goddess had planned the release of Anne and Greg, outlining their plot in such unsuspecting joyousness? Two months? Two *centuries!*

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I didn't mean —— "

"No," she said, earnestly, "for I have been thinking, too."

It was wonderful that, even yet, they failed to realize that these silences were bringing them closer than any confidences could have. Strange that, at least, the girl could indulge the peace which their proximity gave her, and emerge from it without consciousness. Or was it, perhaps, that, without becoming aware of it, she had passed, as the man had, into that oneness of heart which marriage itself could hardly have added to? With him, it had been his joy in her and the joy of that never-to-be-forgotten dream. With her, though without the dream, it had been the same, simple, sacred growth of an everlasting and perfect love. Like him, she knew that the

world had changed for her; though, unlike his revelation, the transfiguration had been so untrammelled that she had not once divined its cause. If she had been older, or if she had been less perfectly protected through her eighteen years, if her beauty had brought her worldliness —— But none of these things had been: she typified the divinest gift in this world — save motherhood — a young girl's innocent faith, and tender gentleness.

And the man was fit for marriage, yes, even for marriage with such as she.

For all her unconsciousness and the man's muteness, he had sought her, and she had received him. They were far more betrothed than Greg and Anne, who presently summoned them to tea.

CHAPTER XXIV

GREG'S MALADY

HE HAD told himself that Greg's fever for work would be shortlived, and, before the end of the week, he saw his opinion verified. Unquestionably, Greg made the effort; but his endeavour could not alter his heritage. Years of inertness, legacy of a long line of safely conservative ancestors, were showing their effect. The offices were a prison to him; regular attendance a fruitless penance; and the whole project hostile, unsolvable, and — too late. He bent over his desk by the hour, his eyes set, his whole body actionless. Then, he would walk the floor, stare from one after another of the windows; then go to the private office of the big man, and, after gloomily studying his absorption, ask information on trivialities explained already an hundred times. Day after day, he would do this, each day more dissatisfied and valueless. Until the American would try again the exposition which he knew, in advance, would result only in new boredom.

Then, from being merely sullen, Greg became openly cynical: it was clear now that nothing could be done with him or for him! What was the use of trying? This farce with Australian wools! He didn't know whether the fault was most his or his teacher's, but he did know he couldn't get past the infant class. Better do the whole

thing, and get him a blackboard. Perhaps, then, he could make something out of these schedules and percentages! Best thing he could do was to go back to work he could manage. He'd never fallen down so at the *consulate!* The twenty-five thousand from Hooper or Cooper & Sons — he couldn't be sure which, but he'd *give it back.*

"For God's sake, brace up!" growled the American. "A sick dog would give me more stimulus and companionship!"

"Then get one," came the impersonal answer, "and let me go after *them!*"

The big man found this strange acceptance more ominous than the wildest outburst. So had Paxton, the singer, talked, and Carstairs, the last time he had seen them. How many times he and Greg had agreed that they should have been warned into greater watchfulness by that quietude! It was warning, now, to the American.

"By Gad!" he cried, as naturally as he could affect, "I was trying you out, to see how far you *would* go! And now I'm going to give you some straight news: we've just cleaned up another contract, and your share'll be a bit over ten thousand. Not so much as Hooper & Son's, but it helps! I've stuck it in the bank for you. Now, go out and buy something, and remember you're getting rich."

"Rich? I guess I am. I'd forgotten. But, I say, old man, it's too late, now. Money or no money: what's the use of it?" He shook his head. "I say, Ormsby, don't you envy them?"

The big man did not raise his eyes from the schedule

he was studying. "Oh, go to the devil," he said deliberately, "and let me work!"

"Yes, it's just as they said: it's all right for *you*, for you know you're to be the last."

Ormsby pushed back his papers, and leaned across the desk.

"I've tried to convince you, and now I'm going to do it, for all time: you remember the afternoon we got the word Chadwell had gone? You remember I had said we must stick together, in Durban, not any of us try to get away? . . . You and Carstairs went out, then, to overhaul Paxton, you'd said. But, instead, you got the first train you could."

"And," Greg broke in, "you saw us and. . . . In God's name, why didn't you let us go, instead of coming *after* us?"

"I'm coming to that," said the big man slowly: "my meeting you, there, was *accident, the last thing I looked for: I didn't know you and Carstairs were on the train.*"

"Didn't come after us? You don't mean ——?'

"Just that: after all I'd said about fighting the thing out here, and keeping together, I was trying flight myself. I saw you, for the first, just before the train began to slow down for Pietermaritzburg. I knew you'd discover me, in another moment, so I moved first: *I* discovered *you*. If you hadn't taken that train, I'd have gone through to Kimberley, closed things up there, then struck overland for the coast."

"And," Greg took up the narrative, "by this time, you'd have been ——"

"Dead," completed the big man, "or out of South Africa."

Bradbroke nodded. "I seem to be your evil genius, for first I get you into this, then keep you from getting out of it."

"On the contrary, you have given me what I can never make up to you."

"*I* have?" Greg stared at him. "What, in God's name? You're mad as — *I* am, but I'd like to know what you mean, just the same!"

The big-boned face had gone suddenly bloodless. "Never mind, now, Greg." His lips set, for suddenly he had realized the joy it would be to him to tell his secret even to Greg. But the realization made him only the more self-watchful. He prayed that he had bred no suspicion in the other's mind. And, to sterilize it, if there were such, he employed the instant for what it served as a natural opening. "I've just had a tip on Kimberley to risk almost your honour on. I'm going to put something up on it, and I suggest you stick on everything you've got."

Greg flew for his check-book. "Here!" He dashed the check off. "But you'll have to manage it."

"I will, this time. With this private wire, we ought to know for sure in forty hours. Maybe sooner. I'll get at it now."

"If only it takes hold of him as I've seen it take others," he thought. "And the best way to get him started is to have him win something pretty fair, then lose, then double and win again."

It proved so. That first venture, "managed" by the big

man, brought Greg a little harvest. The second cost him about what he had won on the first one. But, from the third, he reaped a grand and golden store. And it was a new Greg now. He'd have risked all he had, on the *next* venture, if the American had not interposed.

"Don't crowd your luck," he warned. "You'll probably get cleaned, if you do. Best thing is to pull out, now, for a little, and buy some more things. You've told everlastingly about what you *used* to have."

Greg bought. First, dogs and horses. Then, characteristically, what he referred to as "the bills." And these must have been far heavier than he had owned to, for he announced that his pockets were empty of winnings, in a week. And with the emptiness of his pockets came a return of the depression which lately had spared him.

The big man took it to his counsellor, who took it to Anne. But Greg's cloud did not lift.

"But, by Heaven, there's the market," the American told himself. As before, he sold some of his own "Kimberley" to Greg.

And, again as before, the sun shone with the younger man. Again, Anne was radiant. And why not? The big man had not spared his own holdings: he had swung to Greg this time, a good seventy-five thousand pounds!

On the day that the papers found Greg's new winnings — almost before he himself did — he seemed almost mad with elation. He couldn't really credit it even yet, he said. But it was not from any lack of being told it by his friends and those who envied him. The city had always admired him. He was coming into his own, it said.

Greg came to the office half an hour late.

"We're getting on! And, I say, I gave that first twenty-five thousand to Anne, you know. You thought I'd blow it on bills? Not I? No spendthrift *now!* No end of credit, you know. You'd be surprised!" He laughed jubilantly. "Eh, what?"

"What did you say about Miss Netherby?"

Greg shook his head warningly at the speaker. "Get on a smile, can't you? Imagine something agreeable, for a bit, or — I say, what is it Shakespeare, wasn't it? says about Brutus? 'That day, he overcame the Nerveii.' No, that's not it at all. Shakespeare said —— He was pointing to Brutus, that is Cassius —— *I've* got it: he said:

> 'Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look.
> 'He thinks too much. Such men are — are ——'

I say, you know, old chap, I don't know what the deuce he did say, now! *You* try! *Got* it?" he cried, before the big man could speak. "He said: 'are *dangerous.*' It took Shakespeare! *He* knew 'em. Awful gift to have — such a memory! Calls up all sorts of things! You'd be surprised."

The big man nodded deliberately. "Must be almost a burden. But about Miss Netherby?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure. She wants you to put the twenty-five thousand I gave her right back in Kimberley. For her, you know. You'll do it, I say, old chap?"

The American whirled him around. "You can't mean you're willing to let her *risk* it?"

"Don't I? Don't we, the three of us, Anne and I and Miss Langmaid? Well, rawther! No risk, you know: not with *you* running it! Here it is."

And he left the big man standing motionless, Anne Netherby's check for twenty-five thousand pounds in his hand.

For what could he do? The money was Anne's, and to refuse to act for her was impossible. It was equally impossible for him to do what he longed to: teach Greg a lesson, and, at the same stroke, lower Anne's potentiality by having every pound of the twenty-five thousand swept away. No, there was only one thing to do: study the market as he had never done before, even when speculating for himself and trying to make it *sure*, without impairing his own holdings — a sacrifice he would not make for her, though he had done it willingly for Greg! Yes, though if he saw anything slipping, he'd back it up, he'd *have* to! with his own "Kimberley," for, f it lost — he could see Greg's face, when the news came: it would mean such consciousness of disgrace to him that he'd dash, headlong, for the ultimate, which, at moments far less burdensome, he so envied having been gained by the other four. For, though lifted now out of reach of that tiger of gloom, Greg was never safe from it: let him sink ever so little, and its exaction would be sure. And once *that* — The big man knew. Cost what he might, Bradbroke stood between It and him. *Bradbroke was The Man Between*, and he'd got to keep him on!

It was after such revery, followed by seemingly endless hours of scrutiny of the market, that the big man placed Anne Netherby's twenty-five thousand pounds.

"Where? Where?" Greg had demanded.

The big man told him, and Greg bolted away.

"Promised I'd keep 'em posted," he threw back. "I won't be long!"

Then they waited.

The word came. It was a victory, amazing even to the American; another one of those unexpectedly golden smiles which the presiding Deity of the Market seemed pleased to reserve for him. He received it mutely, hardly hearing Greg's half-incoherent cries. It was true, verified at once past all doubting. Anne had won very heavily. For the rest of her life, she would never know money-need again.

Her delirious joy almost frightened the big man. The hands which crushed his, the instant she saw him, scorched. He could hardly endure her eyes. The avalanche of her gratitude, and her flood of hysteric tears! How much more acceptable he found the reserved, quietly told happiness of her father and Lady Netherby! And, richer by far than all, the look She received him with. The English violet's eyes were wet, and no words measured her meaning, but she gave him her soft, true hand.

Greg had stood back, watching their joy with mocking eyes. Then, he went across to the American.

"Now my secret, old chap: I'm a winner myself: when you told me where you'd put Anne's, I went in on it myself: stuck on every bally pound!"

For a moment the big man stood like a statue, then he caught Bradbroke's hand.

"I congratulate you," he said. His smile would have amazed them if they could have seen its ingredients: it was a surrender, the first that he had ever made. "I believe I'm tired," he said slowly. Anne and Greg and Lord

and Lady Netherby had instantly gone together; the only one who heard him was the one to whom, of all, he spoke.

She was standing beside him, looking up anxiously into the big-boned face.

"God help me, I've done too much, for they'll marry now," he breathed, before he could check himself.

Something made them both turn. Greg and Anne were approaching, followed by the others in a chorus of exclamations: "You people think you've got the real news, but you haven't," Greg laughed. "Miss Langmaid, Ormsby, old chap, let me present you to my wife: Anne and I were married this afternoon at four o'clock!"

CHAPTER XXV

FEAR

IT WAS done. He had given his stumbling congratulations. Only once, while going through the crazy questions and answers, had he met her eyes, as she held Anne in her arms. Then, he had gone.

For he had had to go. Not that he might steady himself from the revelation of Greg's deceit; sudden as that had been, it was not what had driven the American. It was the confession he had read in the violet eyes, their message the pinnacle of his despair! He tried to tell himself that he had seen nothing. He reiterated that it had been only his own love's reflection. He had deluded himself, lied to himself: he had seen *nothing!* But he knew that his lie was truth. He must see her. He must never see her again. The oath he had taken, the self-control he had vaunted, the power of will he had boasted, the manhood he had affirmed his — all had deserted him.

Where could he take this Fear of his? He felt no strength, only blank, dull, dumbing weakness. Where should he go? Wherever he went, he knew that this would go with him. Already, though but so recent a possession, it had become a part of him. He knew that he should stay on in Durban. He could consider being nowhere else, now. Now, even more than before, Durban spelled the world for him. He should stay on. He should keep

on as he had been doing. He should keep up the business. He should keep Greg with him. Though married, Greg would require him, for the cloud would settle down again. On the other hand, Greg's position toward him now seemed altered, no longer to be an affair of his. It startled the big man to realize how distant Greg and his fate seemed when compared with this which, for one short moment, he had surprised in her eyes! How dared he! What right had he! None, and he knew it. But he knew what he had seen in her eyes.

He came back to this, let his thoughts diverge, however obediently. He came back and back to it. And, with it, other things came to him: that he was young, and fit for marriage, even this marriage — no man ever could be fit for *this!* and he had sought it as Esau his father's blessing, penitently and with tears. Now it awaited him . . . a reality diviner than his dreams! He would go to her and tell her, ask her ——! It meant that he was going mad.

Yet, from his madness, he was winning a great understanding. Of Greg, among others: while Greg's words were falling, he had sworn to paint his act to him, reveal to him what he had meted out to Anne — widowhood instead of wifehood; had told himself that he should listen to no attempt at extenuation, no excuse. But now, though he realized that he should never feel otherwise toward him, the big man knew that he should never loose his lips to Greg.

Now that Greg and Anne had married past any recalling, he should accept it. Greg would probably buy a place outside of town, somewhere. That would free him

from the hated supervision. That freedom would mean open danger, but Greg would not realize it. Or it might be that he did realize it, and had decided to face it, take his happiness while it lasted, live for the present. Greg *had* decided that. He showed it by his frank defiance.

Well, let it be so. Living for the present might not be so wholly beyond Greg's rights. It was no more than many others did! The big man was gaining a clearer view of many things.

Greg, then, had decided to live while he could; in some manner, had been able to absent the fact of his fate up to the latest moment of its arrival. He had decided to take *all* that the Gods had given him, and marriage with Anne had been a part of it. So viewed, his act seemed less monstrous. It dwindled still more when the big man realized that not even Greg's own happiness in the marriage equalled Anne's. While he lived, Greg would give her all she could wish for. The thousands and hundreds of thousands, almost, which the big man had given him outright had multiplied into an unexpectedly vast aggregate. Greg was a rich man now; and, at his death, all of it would pass to Anne. They could not go back to England, of course. But they could live happily as they would in Durban, until Greg *went*. So why not——? There lay the thought again, the fear and the danger; why not do as Greg had done? The danger of understanding Greg's point of-view, as the big man knew that he must not do, for the argument found an irresistible ally in his love.

He had been wandering on, heedless of streets and squares; and, looking about him, now for the first time, he swung heavily in the direction in which his offices lay,

for work, which had aided him in lesser crises, might relieve him now.

He made the way slowly. How far he had wandered, in his self-questioning! It was nearly six, a good hour, a terrible hour! since he had gone from the Netherbys'.

"Has any one called — anything come in?" he asked a clerk as he entered. He knew that his hope, vague as it was, was part of his fear and of his new cowardice.

"No, sir. Mr. Bradbroke ——"

"Here," Greg's voice called from the big man's private room. He turned there. Greg was waiting by the desk.

"Come in and shut the door," he said, musically. And, as the American did so, "Now, if you say so, we'll go over it. Give it to me straight, and get it through!"

The big man met the languidly defiant eyes quietly.

"I've said all I have to say, Greg, except just one thing: in a moment, I'm going out to buy the Grainton bungalow, just back of the Bluff, and have it put in order double quick. The deed will be made out at once, in your name. If you've no objections, you may consider it my present to the bride."

What was there in that to trouble Greg? Yet the boy's eyes hurt the man who met them. What was it? "Greg," he said, "don't! I thought ——"

Greg was leaning against him. "I say, you know, you mustn't. It's — I can't let ——" He had shrunk away. "Not after what —— I've *told* you I've done you the worst wrong ever done a man."

The big man laughed quietly. "You're only a kid, Greg. Get your hat and we'll get the deed. In a minute you'll be asking me to come and *live* with you, I mean

would have; and I'd have accepted and bored you both to death, and been sent home in disgrace. Wouldn't have minded the disgrace as much as the being sent home."

Something, probably the last word, threw them both back.

Greg paled. "Ormsby," he said, self-reproachfully, "Ormsby, I ought to have ——"

The broad hand went out to him, "As long as you ——" He began again, hastily: "You'll never be able to speak for just yourself again. From now on, it'll be Anne first, last, and all the time, with you. So," with an effort at his banter of the moment before, "don't get out the invitation until you've asked your wife."

He knew that Greg had not meant that; but it was better to treat it that way, for it was too late now for Greg to look behind. "I say," he said, when the deed was drawn, signed, and in Greg's hands, "I'll come in often to see you. My rooms'll be pretty lonely now." Lonely? Suddenly he realized how lonely they would be, and he changed the subject. "Tell Anne I hope she'll like the place. When shall you move in?" He nodded. "I'm forgetting: it's not ready yet; but the renovating and the rest of it can't take long."

"What I want to know is, how you knew just the place for us?" Greg spoke mechanically.

"Don't know," said the big man; then, unguardedly, "Probably because it would have been the one place I'd have picked out for myself."

"Would have?" Greg came a step nearer. "That means — it shows what you think of me."

"If I'd been in your place, I'd have done just what you have. But, you see, I'm not in your place — in any way."

"Glad you said that. I thought, at first ——"

"*Don't* think, Greg. Instead, run and tell Mrs. Bradbroke! I'm impatient to see you settled there."

"You're not half so impatient as I am," Greg called back, as he closed the office door, to which they had gone to put the deed in the big man's safe. "Come along, soon!" he cried, as he turned in the direction of the Netherbys'.

"And I *will* go there and see them," the big man was saying aloud in his loneliness, "for She'll be with Lady Netherby, and Greg and Anne will be at the bungalow — alone." He had remembered that he must never see her again.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ENGLISH VIOLET

BUT, as if to sap the big man's decision not to see her and not to live for the present, came to him a realization immediate and indubitable: that marriage with Anne seemed the best thing in the world for Greg. Renovating and finishing and furnishing had hardly been crowded through before the two moved in. And house and grounds bloomed as if magic lay in the touch of the bride's pretty fingers. The bungalow had been admirable before; now, it was the very home of happiness. It was as if she had poured into its possibilities all the instinct for charm and domestic allurement which she had accumulated, without hope of fruition, through the long and hopeless years; and her pride in her handiwork, the glory it was to her, spoke in each room and nook as an actual presence, called instantly into fullest life.

Encouraged by the big man's example, Greg filled it with all that they had ever longed for. Durban's shops at last confessed limitations, and recourse was had to the Cape. Still other orders were sent to England.

It was at the end of the second week of its new occupancy that the big man first went to the bungalow. To the Netherbys' he could not go; and his own rooms had become intolerable! When he gave up his rickshaw, and

climbed the low flight of steps to where Greg and Anne waited him, he felt what others had detailed to him: that he was entering not only a charmingly equipped house, but a home. And Anne! For a moment his wonder at her was so absolute that he forgot the tragedy beneath: charming as a girl, she was exquisite as a bride and hostess. She did not once speak of his gift to Greg and herself. Hardly once — except at that one moment of her discovery of her sudden wealth — had she recognized his effective services. But now she welcomed him with an earnestness which confessed all, yet did not embarrass him. She showed the homeless man what a home could be to him.

In her happiness with Greg she did not realize her cruelty in the disclosure: that he visualized a home in which the English violet would welcome him when the day's work was done.

For he was very domestic. Like most men who have gone the world over in bachelorhood, he had come to loathe clubs, except for an evening now and then. The freedom to come and go soon had come to possess a prison quality, revealing the monotonous round of which it was made up. Early he had come to feel that life could not be meant to give only that. He had longed for that utter and blessed companionship. And now it was revealed to him, made infinitely the more vivid and precious in such a setting as he had assured to Anne and Greg.

He asked himself, over and over, what would be the end of it. He had acquired the power, now, to put the question quite calmly, for it seemed to him that the accumulation of his bitterness had robbed him of ca-

pacity further to be hurt. What, after he had endured the rest, would be the end of it? Sometimes, for brief, stolen moments, he told himself that Greg's deception of Anne had been just and right. But he put this temptation behind him quickly, for disloyalty to his own love followed fast in the wake of it. At other times he would find himself dreaming of a return to America. But this dream was even shorter than the other, and even less frequently indulged, immeasurably less pleasurable. For he knew that he should never return, that he had nothing to return to now. Here, where he had seen his Heaven, he should find his end.

He wondered if she ever thought of him. He assured himself that she had sensed at least a part of his fear for her. Not once had he met her at the bungalow. She had been there; he knew that from Anne; but they had not met there. By some rare and characteristic divination, she had found this way of helping him.

It was after such a revery that he accepted Greg's next invitation to dinner; the next one, and the next. He was increasingly welcome at the bungalow. His "room" was there.

"No one else'll ever sleep in it," Greg had proclaimed. And, if he added, "so long as I'm here," it was with a laugh which was almost natural. There was no question about it, the marriage had made him over: from the taut-nerved, brooding boy, who had leaned on the big man with almost the dependence of a woman, Bradbroke had become a man, not yet one with sturdiest virility, but alert, nevertheless, and seemingly confident. That was it: *seemingly*. The big man never overlooked that

limitation, the slight, yet to him always visible, unwillingness with which Greg spoke of the future to his other guests. He wondered by what alchemy Greg had induced Anne so to alter that, despite their new, financial ability, she said no word of returning to England. But, whatever the explanation — and it continued to remain remote to the American — Durban seemed to be all in all to them: it was as if they had gone back, genuinely, to the first aspect they had offered him of South Africa; but he knew, now, that their attitude could be taken at its face value. It was not the masterly deception which it had required the merciless interloper in the street, with his crazy song, to disclose. Something had altered them. The money, probably. And the big man was grateful, hoping only for its sufficient continuance. He still swung this and that revenue to Greg out of the partnership, for he still saw, grinning closer and closer, the day when Greg, after having gone to the office as usual, would not return. And, in the safe seclusion of the big man's private office, Greg would say, as the pounds added and multiplied:

"Yes, I know, Ormsby, but what's the use? We've got enough to keep us on, and she'll be safe, afterward. So, what's the good in any more of it? What's the use?"

And, as he met the steady eyes, set in the lean, big-boned, grave face, "For it's just as if a doctor had said to us, after he'd looked us over, 'You've got a few months more to live, probably!' Meaning," Greg would unvaryingly conclude, "'Take no thought to the morrow'; and that's what I'm doing. Only there's this difference: the shrewdest diagnosticians go wrong, sometimes; but *we're sure.*"

They rarely spoke of it now, in further detail. The Greg at the office would have been unrecognizable to Anne Bradbroke. She would have understood as little his comment on the ever-increasing income, "What's the use?" — as little dreamed that the expression was now habitual to Greg. Only by that one act — the marriage — had Greg seemed, to the big man, to have found "the use."

"And you've not written a word home about it?" he would ask Greg.

"No," was the unvarying answer. "Have you?"

"No."

Greg would shake his head. "When you're alone, there in the rooms —— Gad! Ormsby, don't you find it intolerable?"

"Yes." Only the monosyllable.

Time after time, following this exchange of interrogatories, Greg would consult Anne, and then take the American home with him.

In this way, and quite without any appearance of unnaturalness, he maintained his quiet espionage of Greg.

Though he continued to avoid the Netherbys, he led the talk again and again to them, when at the bungalow. Lord and Lady Netherby were taking Marian about the country, Anne said, at last: they had spent a couple of days at the Cape, and were now doing Johannesburg and Pretoria; and might even keep on up into the Transvaal. She quoted the latest letter. Wouldn't he come up to dinner at seven, Thursday night? Greg joined in, and the big man promised. This was on a Saturday afternoon.

But, on Wednesday morning, Anne called him up at the office: her mother had wired from Pietermaritzburg — Africander as she now boasted she was, Anne had not yet learned to abbreviate the word to the colloquial "Maritzburg" — that the Rivett-Coltons were about to descend with innumerable nurses and children. They might arrive Thursday morning. Wouldn't he come to-night at half-past six?

Yes, of course.

It had been one of his worst days: Greg had dawdled, and finally gone away early, his face white and drawn. The big man knew the signs; and, because, in his resulting anxiety, he had forgotten, said nothing of the morning talk with Anne. But six-fifteen found him walking up the drive to the bungalow.

"If I can manage a moment with Anne," he said, as he made the steps, "I'll warn her that Greg's overworking." He looked from the veranda, hoping that she might be in the rose-garden. But she was not, and only its own, subdued jangle resulted when he pressed the bell.

Waiting, he wondered why —— Nervousness! He upbraided himself. Then rang again. At least, the servants would be about somewhere!

A step on the gravel at his left made him turn. "Anne," he thought.

"*You?*" he said.

Their violet never before so deep, she raised her eyes to his.

"Yes," she said, slowly, hesitatingly. "Anne told me ——"

That told *him:* Anne's handiwork this, turned traitor by her gratitude.

But this thought was only subconscious. He descended to her. She ascended to him. So it happened that after one instant, in which neither spoke, they turned, and as if to their own home, went up the steps side by side.

"She told me that you were at Pietermaritzburg."

"She told me that you were at Kimberley."

He looked wretchedly away from her. "I meant — I was coming ——"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I know."

He looked down into her eyes. How wonderful she was! There was nothing in the whole world like her gentleness! Then he turned his eyes from her. It would be easier, that way, and he must take advantage of everything that he could. But Fate, which he had thought must be through with his torture, was not through: for it showed him the softly lighted, peaceful, domestic inner room: the rattan and wicker — cool, comfortable, restful, again his taste and choice; from where he stood he could see two chairs at the table, waiting, as if they, too, were in the universal conspiracy which must end in overpowering him. And between them and this glimpse of the home all his soul cried out for, waited — the English violet.

It was too much! The soft light on the big-boned face was merciless to him, as his love was. For one moment, she read it. Then, his face went down into her outstretched hands. In another, reason came back to him, and he pressed her away from him.

"Forgive me," he whispered, "for what you can never

forgive. Go to England! For, because I have not the right to love you, to see you is more than I can bear."

"Not the right?" she begged. She revealed herself anew to him in that her voice held only grief and incredulity.

"No, not the right, though I believe heaven itself pities me. I am held by a curse that I have not earned. I am doomed, without hope. There can be no escape for me."

She had crossed the distance between them. "Instead of going back to England — " her voice broke, "let me stay. No, no! Not *go!* Don't you *see*, it can never be now," she cried, with the utter sorrow of a child.

"Go back to England. God bless and protect you so tenderly always." For one never-to-be-forgotten moment, he held her close in his arms and kissed her lips, her hair, and her soft temples. Then, he was down the steps. And she knew that he had gone.

CHAPTER XXVII

ALONE

HE HAD asked her to go, and he knew that she would go. But, fast on the heels of his entreaty the realization of what her obedience would mean to him had come so poignantly that, while he walked, night-long, through the voiceless streets of the sleeping city, he had been coward enough to hope that she would not go. But morning brought him sanity. And Greg, coming into the office an hour after the other had reached it, brought the word:

"The devil's to pay, Ormsby: Miss Langmaid's sailing to-day for home, and Anne's getting out mourning. Blames me, blames you! Angry and teary together! I say, old chap, why didn't you wait, last night? I'd just gone over to tell Lady Bam the Rivett-Coltons were coming. Expected to be back before you came. Knew Miss Langmaid was there and you wouldn't be lonely." He looked up into the big-boned face. "Nothing wrong, I hope, old chap?"

Greg nodded slowly, then walked to the window, looking out for slow, long moments. Then, he turned back, "I know," he cried with sudden passion. "If it weren't for *your* knowing, and your *being* here, I'd have given in long ago, and sent my ghost off into the ether after Hugh and Brett and Carstairs and Jem. Sometimes," he

went on, after a long pause, "I can almost believe that they're *not* dead. I know they are; but I find myself looking on ahead, in the old way, I used before It began: the old life here comes back to me; the old drudgery at the consulate; Brett wearing his heart out for a girl who'd forgotten him and never cared for him and sent him a picture of her and her baby — I swear there never was such cruelty before! how he ever supported himself, I used to wonder; wish he'd cleared that up, *first!* Used to think it was secret gambling, but it couldn't have been, for he'd neither the skill nor luck; Jem basting about, always looking for something, and never finding it; Hugh grinding himself down for his gold company, no pay, no present, no future — how he used to talk to me of it! Gad! Carstairs getting that little of his from home, just a shade more than Jem got, but not coming so regularly, so they broke about even; always telling about his mythical trust company. Tried to pin him down to locating it once, but saw I'd hurt him, and cut it out! *Wasn't* any such thing as that trust company! And the girls: most of 'em worse fixed by a lot than we men were, but standing it a lot better, the way a woman always does. Gad, I'd seen 'em change from girls to women the first year after we got here! Poor little Shirley Framleigh tried once to get a place in a shop — in a shop, by Gad, as a model, a thing they hang gowns on, yes, by the Lord, a manikin! Got the place, and stood it somehow. None of us knew she was doing it. Then, one day, Anne had to go to the shop for something, finally got in the cloak department, didn't dream of it! Of course, they didn't show they knew each other. But one of the sales-

women, one of the head ones, whatever you call 'em, caught Shirley up for something, went after her no end, all kinds of things, and Anne took Shirley and kissed her and patted her and floored the floorwalker and took Shirley home with her. Shirley 'd had some trouble with the aunt she'd been living with. No question, the old lady's no end disagreeable, but — anyway, it was too bad!"

"Yes, it's too bad," said the big man absently. He wished Greg had not told him how bad it was.

"Hazel Ellicombe, too. Well, the Almighty knows, maybe, what the Ellicombes live on. A shot different, if you ask me, from what they had at home. Hazel never complains, though, not even when she gets these clothes, to make over herself, from some of the connection at home. Got used to it by now, likely. Anyway, never complains. Neither did Anne. But Catherine Hetheridge" — he hurried on, "Gad! when Catherine turns on that — that Jewish woman, what's her name? Zelig, they say she daren't call her soul her own! Catherine's the only thing in the world a woman with a moustache like that could be afraid of. Odd business, if you ask me! Suppose Catherine had to, but — I say, ever hear ——?"

The big man got up from his chair. "More than I want to again!" He shook his head.

"Oh, come now," Greg objected, "what's the harm? We're all in the same boat, ain't we? Same *boat?* Fancy that's not much wrong, only you and I are the worst fixed of the lot." He shot the words out savagely, as if, by some devious and infinitely detached reasoning, he had succeeded, to his own satisfaction, in fastening liability

for their fate on the big man. "I say," he broke out again, after a moment, "Miss Langmaid's leaving to-day, going home, back to England. I was to tell you. Between us, I'm no end glad. Can't tell what'll come to any one, off, out of everything, down here, and she's a no end fine girl. Now, she'll go back there and marry some one. No one she could marry *here!* She's going back to England, I say. And why don't you go back to America? Oh, I know," bitterly, "it can't hinder the Thing coming; but, for the matter of that, it can't probably hurry It. Why don't you go, and anyway be in a spot you like, while you do live? You used to be such a *live* chap, had more energy than I'd ever *seen!* But now, all you do is sit here, working, working! Heaven," he sent his thin arms out, "in your place ——!"

"In my place," said the big man thoughtfully. "Tell me what you would do, in my place."

Greg met his eyes for a moment, then turned away.

"Yes," he said moodily, "I suppose so. As well wait for It here as anywhere. That's what I'm doing. But still ——" He shook his head, in the dull, baffled way which had now come to be such a part of him. Then he turned back to the big man: "Why did it have to come to us? We hadn't done anything, I mean been any worse than the rest, yet there they go," he swung his arm toward the crowds which sifted along before the window, "poor prisoners to poverty all of 'em, but *free*, while you and I ——" Again he broke off abruptly, his eyes, of the colour of burnt wood, seeming to find a fascination — so strong was their envy — in those polyglot free-agents,

who encumbered the Durban sidewalks, yes, in even the Zulus and Kaffirs who, not being allowed the courtesy and convenience of the narrow sidewalks, flowed along sluggishly in the gutters, hung, for a time, in the eddies at the street corners, then drifted on again. "I know," he came out again with, having regained his starting-point, "but wouldn't even the *waiting* be easier in a place you know and love? With people you've known and liked for a long time, people who'd known *your* people — there's a lot in that — wouldn't waiting, even though it's only just waiting, be better there? Of course, you couldn't tell them anything; but — just the same. Why, I think of England, and if we could only go back to it, Anne and I. Seems to me, sometimes, I've got to see England once more — *before!*" His shoulders set, as if to resist a shudder which had gone through them. "When I hadn't a pound saved, it was to go back with Anne and *live* there. And now, when we've *got* all this money, all I'd hope for from going would be to see it once more, and then ——" His face turned away sharply. No need for him to define.

"When," asked the big man, after a time, "does she sail?"

"Miss Langmaid? At noon. It seems to me, if I got down to that dock and knew that boat would take me to —— I say," he swung 'round to the big man, "*you'll* come down, of course?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll go up now and tell Anne I've told you. She's been helping her with the packing and stuff since breakfast." He opened the door. "The Rennie dock,

you know. Same one you and Carstairs, I mean you and I, went to. At twelve."

The door slowly opened. He looked back. Then the door slowly closed.

He went to the boat. Because it might have meant seeing her alone, he had not gone, in the interval, to the Netherbys'. And, there at the dock, he was glad of the crowd and the tumult, glad, too, that of all those who had heard and come to see her leave them, he alone had sought out a florist's. While the rest encircled her, he stood back. How he wished, now that she was so nearly away, that he *had* gone to the Netherbys'! But, when the whistle ashore sounded, he found himself suddenly beside her, the porters thrust aside, and his own hands lifting her luggage.

"No, you must let me," he heard himself saying. "I got these for you." This was while he was giving her the roses which he had been so glad to find. They had been the next best to English violets. Then, in the same daze which had suddenly come on everything, he realized that he was following her down a corridor, after a white-jacketed steward, to her very stateroom. For a wild moment, he said to himself:

"I will go with her to England." And, even for another, saner moment, he held the impossible thought to his breast. For she was looking up into his face, the violet eyes raining tears.

"Dearest, let me stay with you," she was crying, her young arms about him, as he held her; "let me stay and have whatever comes to you!"

It was heaven. For one heartbeat, he held her and

kissed her even while crying: "Because I love you so, you must go!" Then he tore himself from her, and somehow found the corridor and the plank. From the dock, he looked back once to where she stood at the rail, seeing him only. Then his arms went out. The steamer receded. And he knew that she had gone.

"What did you say?" some one asked, beside him. It was Bradbroke. And the big man knew that he was answering something. He was dividing the crowd, suddenly, to be halted by a woman crying, in a voice hard to him:

"You've driven her away. I hope, now, you suffer. I'm glad! I'm glad!"

"Anne, for God's sake! The *others!*"

That was Greg, of course. But could the woman really have been Anne?

It was; and, beside herself almost, she raced on. "She didn't tell me. But I know. You made her love you, then —— Oh, Greg, I can't even think of it! Take me home!"

His eyes met Greg's for an instant. "At the office," Greg's lips said, over Anne's head. "Yes, home now," he said to Anne.

The big man had stood passive under her mad denunciation. Unjust? Yes, but what did that matter? It was just another injustice in an unjust world! But it was done now, and he could go. He sent his bulk against the coolies who cowered away from him terror-struck; and, in another moment, was in the sun-seared street, his heart dead, his eyes seeing only what he knew that he should see even through the hereafter — a brave, beautiful face, the most wonderful face in the world to him,

soft, sweet lips, dropping with a child's utter sorrow, violet eyes, deep, true, and faithful, their tears wetting his roses, which she pressed to her lips, her heart and breast. Back, back, through streets grown suddenly strange to him, the streets of a city which he seemed never to have known earlier. On back, after what gropings he knew not. Back, into that dark and dreadful loneliness which now must be his forevermore!

CHAPTER XXVIII

WAITING

"AT THE office," Greg had signalled, as he led Anne away. But the big man had no intention of keeping that appointment. He should not be in Durban, when Greg looked for him at their offices.

Half an hour later, after seeing his trunk packed, locked, and swung into the rickshaw, he turned his back on the rooms in which he had lived, it seemed to him, for a thousand days.

"To Kimberley," he told the agent in the ticket-window at the little station.

"One way?" asked the official.

"One way."

He remembered, idly, that it was six hundred and eight miles from Durban to Kimberley by the Natal Government Railway, which went by way of Van Reenen Modderpoort, and that the journey required forty-two hours. £4, 11s., he recalled, sub-consciously, was the fare, first-class. He paid the amount, found a seat in a carriage, and closed his eyes. He felt no interest in the transit. He wanted to get to Kimberley. For Kimberley represented to him a place where he could be alone, and, as long as he had to, could *wait*.

He had selected it by instant decision. And it did not come over him, until the train had started and Dur-

ban was slipping behind him, that he had left no word for Greg. He reflected impersonally that he would write to him, some time, just say that he had gone to Kimberley to — *wait*.

Even now, while half-admitting that he should have told Greg, he felt no stroke of conscience. For the man had gone through what had dulled his every sense. Greg would go to the offices, then, not finding him there, would telephone, or go to the club, probably; then to his rooms, the ones that had been his, and look about just as he and Greg and Carstairs had done at Paxton's; and as he and Greg had done, later — not much later — at Carstairs.' Then, Greg would understand. How simple it all was: Greg would understand.

If he had once stopped to think of it, he would have realized that he was crediting Bradbroke with such powers of understanding as the boy had never had. And yet, it was not so much that: Greg had not altered. It was the big man who had altered, having come, quite suddenly, not to care whether Greg understood or not. He did not care. That was it: he didn't care, now; and it came over him with almost a comforting power, that he had now let everything go, that he was openly defying what had already claimed Fraser and the three others, and would soon claim Greg and himself. It could come when It would. He didn't care, now. Though he accepted the facts as fully as ever, even more fully, he felt no fear. He had given up too much, been robbed of too much, been robbed of *everything*! Greg was nothing to him any longer, afforded him not the least responsibility.

It gave him a strange, infinitely relaxed sense of free-

dom to realize that he could feel like this, and he leaned idly back in his seat, scanning the other passengers. Yes, they were just like the rest, just like the crowd which peopled the better streets in Durban: each of them going, placidly and acceptingly, or tensely and bitterly, about his appointed way. Everything was appointed for every one, in this world! It didn't matter how much any one had, in the way of ostensible power of resistance; he got what was laid out for him. It was the same way with these people here, the seven beside himself — for the compartment was full. He didn't care about them either! There was a German, a Jew, two Dutchmen, and three Englishmen.

He realized that his thoughts were about to retreat, and so he despatched them on ahead to Kimberley, wondering if the sheet-iron shack were still there. Then, he smiled — in the utter abstraction of his despair, he could smile almost lazily — remembering that the two months, since he had left it, could hardly be expected to bring it down. Two months? His hands clenched: he must accept the fact that it was only two months! But was it really possible?

Automatically he leaned back, and glanced over his shoulder from the window. Yes, he was still in Natal, hardly an hour out of Durban, yet. The time again! It was incredible. He raised his hand to his forehead, and the touch started his memory again. It was only an hour and only two months, let the latter seem, as they did, endless centuries. God in Heaven, could he never believe what he knew to be the truth?

He threw himself back in his seat. Was there nothing

that he could do, no fruit of his strength, his powers of resistance? No means of escaping It and regaining Her? He was John Ormsby, an American, a free man and a strong man, and this was the twentieth century! He sprang to his feet, his capable shoulders back! Then, he saw again that fateful room at the Regent, the fiend, hell-sent with the blight of his prophecy; Jem Fraser, the four others, and himself; then, Hammerstone subtracting Jem's inert body; then Chadwell out; then the singer lopped off; then Carstairs; and then only himself and Bradbroke, The Man Between. And, seeing, the big man sank low in his seat again. The twentieth century, yes. And he was still John Ormsby, an American. But this was South Africa, and his life had gone out, just now, when she had obeyed him, and gone away from him.

"What's the use?" he asked himself. Even if he *could* hold out a little longer, what was the use of resisting, now? It was just as Greg had kept saying of the money:

"What's the use?"

He nodded to himself, his eyes closed, his isolation so absolute that he felt himself alone in the swaying carriage. He *was* alone!

Somehow, he slept that night. The succeeding day passed at last, its passage a miracle. At last Kimberley; and he stood at the station, his eyes following the train which had slid along again. After watching it, as one might have a phenomenon, he turned and ascended the staggering street. That night he stretched himself again on the bed in the one-roomed, sheet-iron shack.

It was a triumph of his will and his youth and his powers of endurance, or as shrewd a demonstration of his abject

weariness, that he slept soundly through the long night, to wake amazed at finding himself where he was. For the place had not varied a particle: the bed still stood in the alcove he had set off by the partition; there was the square section of window he had "cut in" by sawing three boards out; the box he had put shelves in for his clothes; the other box end-up, which he had christened his "tobacco table" — he could see along its edge a scatter of dark ashes, the bottom of a smoked-out pipe. Not one thing had changed. The room looked as much as ever like the interior of a big, dry, solidly built packing-box! Leaning on his elbow, he studied it, his eyes every now and then going from where he was, on the bed in the alcove, around as far as they could past the rim of the partition into what he had laughingly told Greg was "the living-room." How happy he had been in it — then! He had spent his days in the Fields, studying the blue, diamondiferous soil, then the shiftings in the market; who was buying and who was selling what; and had come back, each evening, comfortably tired, rolled in the tub his "boy" always had filled and alluring; then a dinner somewhere; then back to the shack, and into his loafing-clothes — a habit preserved from his Harvard days; then to stretch his big length and breadth comfortably out, for a long evening with his books and pipe.

That was all he had had, but he had been very happy in it. It seemed, now, a very small total for the utter satisfying of any one; and he saw in that, what, in those thoughtless days, he had only half suspected: how little since his maturity he had known a home. Nothing approaching it! Nothing in the wide world! Tom, of

course, and Tom's wife. They had been very good to him, asked him to come and live with them, had made him *know* that a room in their little house was his. That had been after Tom had first begun to win the editors, when Tom had first entered the long line of victories which now meant that he had *won*. He could remember his father and his mother with a clarity which, he recognized, was a blessing in itself. He was glad that he had realized that, in time. And what he had seen of many other parents had made him more than ever proud of his own: their nobility in each other's eyes, their reverence for each other, his father's strength and his mother's gentleness — their love. Never had they had much money. His father had been a teacher, almost from the hour of his leaving college, the best-read, the most rarely educated man, the man of the highest literary attainments, that he had ever known. He should have been at the head of a great university. What a power and an influence he would have been there! How the greatest university of them all had needed him! He had been offered a professorship in one of the small colleges, but the college was only an infant, however vigorous, and the opportunity, which would have been only the first in a long list of advancements, had passed: he had retained the headship of his own boarding-school. Then, Tom's college days; then the younger brother's. Then, suddenly, only Tom and the younger brother, Tom writing confidently along in his poverty, and the younger a clerk in a bond house, neither one dreaming, however confident, of what returns their energy was to bring to them. Yes, Tom and Janet had really wanted him. It had not been

mere pity for his loneliness. But he was just beginning to succeed then, and had felt unable to settle down anywhere. He had not wanted a home then. He would move the world! Then, little by little, his clubs had begun to show their lacks to him: they were his own, but they were only *clubs*. And, suddenly, very unwarningly suddenly, he had found that only one thing in the world made a man's home his own; and he had begun his search for Her. Sometimes, it would seem for a brief time that he had found her; but he had always seen the error in time; and he had gone on and on, always keeping himself, always searching — America, England, France, Spain, Germany, north, south, east, and west, until he had half-begun to fear that She was not. And then ——

He would leave a letter for Tom. By the way, he'd better get writing it. You couldn't *tell!* It should give just the bare facts, with a request that Tom should not attempt to find any explanation of the unexplainable. And Tom and Janet and the baby would remember him. The little baby! How dear it suddenly was to him: little Janet! How she had crowed from his shoulder! Tom's shoulder was not so wide or so high as his. Once he had told Her of little Janet, and she had said:

"The dear little thing! The dear little baby!" He wished —— He sent his thoughts back again. It was a good thing for the world that there lived three such happy and lovable people as Tom and Janet and the little baby. He ought to have written them a good deal more regularly, to have showed them a good deal more what they meant to him. Now, all he could do, he had done. He meant what should come to them from his will. Yes,

that was all he could do now. It was too close, this Doom of his, for him to do any one of the thousand things he would have done if he could have lived half as long as he had felt so sure to live! Already, his life was over. All that he could do now was — wait.

Splash! Splash! There was the "boy" filling the tub with water, the same, silent "boy," silent, yet immaturely cordial as ever. Had he really found umJacobi, last night, and told him to come back into his old service, or had he — as seemed far more probable — not been away at all?

He rose from the bed, shaved, and went through his exercises, then to his tub.

"It has been long, umFundize," said the Zulu boy. "By coming again, you have taken the wedge from between my teeth." It was one of the formal salutations of the Zulu, common to all the countless dialects of the ancient Bantu stock. Though formal, it left no doubt of the speaker's relief and gladness. Each morning, in those days that were gone, the Zulu had pronounced it to the big man, and it was not lacking now.

"Thank you, umJacobi," he said listlessly, as he seated himself before the breakfast the other had waiting. "Yes, I've been a long time gone."

To himself, he said, "I'm the only thing that has changed here, but I've been gone so long and so far that I never can get back."

CHAPTER XXIX

KIMBERLEY

HE had fled not from Durban alone, but from all that could remind him of what was lost to him. And, because he knew that it would serve to revive what he had severed himself from, he put off, day after day, the letter which he knew he must write to Greg. By plunging again into speculation, he tried to take his old life up where he had dropped it, seeking, in this way, to banish the obligation of the letter from his consciousness.

And, in a way, he succeeded; the Fields were as unchanged as umJacobi and the shack of sheet-iron. There was the same mechanically perfect production; the same, hopeless losers; the same mad joy on the part of those who won. Little by little, he allowed himself to make new acquaintances. He could have made many with ease, for his name had gone out, and his return. He was still the amazingly lucky American, still "The Human Mint, The Money-Making Machine." Men came to see him. Through the long, quiet evenings, more than one man smoked with him in the sheet-iron shack. There were invitations to clubs and to houses in the little, teeming city. But the gravity of the big-boned face leant strength and obstinacy to his refusals, coupled, though they unvaryingly were, with his frank appreciation of the kindness of the offered hospitality.

So, they set him down as a disappointment, just "another American who cared only for money, after all." He was "not half the chap he'd been before," they decided: "the *American* of it" was "coming out."

However achieved, the result was inevitable: he was neither clubable — for he'd joined only one club, and that the quietest of all — nor sociable, for he didn't go to a house in Kimberley. Gradually, the men got out of the way of visiting him. By the end of the second week, his solitude was as perfect as even he could wish.

If he thought of America, it was only when reviewing the world which he had left. He wrote methodically to Tom and Janet, though. He sent toys of native structure to the baby. He wished he could have seen the baby and Tom and Janet again. "Could have." It was always that now. He wished that they could have seen Her. He felt that they would have appreciated her. With a sense of proprietorship, woeful in its tenderness, he could still thrill with pride in her. Then, do what he could, he would visualize her — to send his face down into his hard-pressing hands. If only he could forget what alone now sustained him — her eyes, wet with her unchecked tears! He must hear of her! Some one must tell him, even the least word! He would write to Greg!

He wrote that evening the shortest of letters, for he wrote only to induce a reply:

"I am at Kimberley, Greg. I could not stay in Durban. If you need me, wire me, and I will come. Otherwise, I shall stay here until It comes for me."

Then, because he was not sure that Greg would consider that this demanded an answer, he added:

"Shall I close out our business there, or will you keep it along yourself?"

Then he signed his name, and mailed the letter with his own hands immediately.

He knew the mails and the distance, and told himself that he should have Greg's answer in five days, possibly in four.

Ten days after he had mailed his own letter, he wrote again:

"Over a week ago, I wrote, but have had no word from you. What's the trouble, Greg? I said I'd come down, if you needed me."

And to this he added:

"Letter must have reached you, for it has not come back to me."

Probably, this second letter would meet Greg's reply to the first, en route. Four days, again, if it didn't. At the longest, five.

He made no pretence of working, now. Day and night he clung to the shack of sheet iron, where umJacobi would find him the instant the letter came. But would it come? The question, so often forced back, remained after the long day, which marked the end of his fourth week at Kimberley. And, the instant the interrogation had taken root, he knew the answer: that Greg's letter would not come.

For what could Greg write, beyond a mere acknowledgment of the letters? And how idle it had been to offer to come, when the need came! The *need* would come

without so much as one warning word. And knowing this, Greg had let the letters pass without comment or even acknowledgement. That he could do this showed how, since his marriage, Greg had moved apart from him.

The big man had not detected the divergence before; but he saw it at last, and, with it, an hundred other evidences, all marking Bradbroke's graduation from his oversight. He was keeping his word: he was living in the present and for it. His recklessness revealed itself still more to the big man now. Yes, that was it: Greg's careless optimism was sheer, mad recklessness. He would call Greg and Anne up by telephone.

He went to the club, and sat staring at the booth, in which some one was standing. While he waited, several men came in, strangers; and one, brown and lean, was telling of the up-country:

"Nothing like it in the world," the lean, brown, young fellow was saying; "been riding transport for two months. Nothing like it! Nothing in the world: I tell you, when you're lying under your wagon-box, in your rubber sheets, with a good man beside you and a good bit of tobacco in your pipe, you wouldn't change places with the King, no, not with the King, himself, by Gad!" He went on, "Nothing to check you! No one to stand over you! No one to tell you what! You're your own man! The high veldt's all around you, and the night and the wind and the deluge of water, thundering down on your wagon-top, and may be even sluicing through the cracks! Nothing like it, I tell you. Nothing in the world!"

The big man turned away. It was incredible, insupportable that any man could find the world like that!

The man in the telephone booth came out. The booth was the American's if he wanted it. He did not want it. What could he say to Greg, after that brown young fellow had told of thinking the world like that? Nothing! He'd go back to the shack. And week followed week, and month came on month. It was July, the beginning of the African winter. He had been three months at Kimberley, without change in his situation, and without one word from Greg.

Then, returning from the Fields, one late afternoon, he went to the club for a glance at the periodicals. It had been long since he had read so much as a newspaper, and he walked slowly two thirds minded to keep straight on home and go to bed. But he turned in at the club, and, as he entered, through the crowd of men standing and sitting, he was aware that one of them looked at him, turned, and slowly walked away. It was crudely done: one glance was enough to show him Hammerstone; and, in another moment, the American's card was in the hands of a "boy," with the affirmation that the writer would see Doctor Hammerstone at once in the second smoking-room.

It was a long moment, before Hammerstone came, and, when he did, it was with obvious unwillingness: his face lacked colour, his hands were gripless, his back was bent. Cursed as the big man was, he looked twice the larger and stronger, though Hammerstone himself was large.

"Nerves," the American said to himself, as their eyes met. The layman was diagnosing the doctor. Aloud, he said, "How long have you been up here, Hammerstone?"

"Only a few days." The voice was weak, too. What had come over him? He was speaking again, still weakly. "How long have you been here yourself?"

The American met his eyes. "I've been here a bit over three months," he said.

Hammerstone nodded. "Interesting."

They were not getting on at all, and the big man hauled out a chair for him, beginning again. "How did you leave ——?"

But Hammerstone shook his head. "Thanks very much, but I'm off directly, and shan't sit down." He glanced at his watch, then held out his hand with a strange formality. "I'm off north, now; but I'll make it a point to stop off on the run back. I — I — I'd no idea you were here."

He turned to the door, and the crowd, but the American crossed the space before he could reach either. "You don't act like yourself! What's wrong, Hammerstone? I know it's odd for *me* to say this; but that's it: you don't seem yourself. What's wrong?"

They were facing each other full now, and the big man studied the doctor, less able, each instant, to understand what could have come over him: he had never seen the other so well-dressed as now, never so obviously prosperous. Yes, that was it: Hammerstone had arrived financially, he had landed very hard, somewhere. Everything but his face, voice, physique and eyes, spoke the prosperous. So what was *bothering* him?

"Can't you speak?" demanded the big man. Unconsciously, his voice had become a command, which his eyes backed up. "Did you come straight here from Durban?

I'm here until It hits *me*, the Thing that's already taken Fraser and Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs." The doctor started back from him. "Why do you do that, Hammerstone? You're familiar enough with the facts! You almost got in on it yourself, but you're being in the next room saved you. As it was, your nearest knowing came when you tried to bring back Jem Fraser. When did you see Greg, and how was he? Tell me that!"

Hammerstone put his hand on his chin. Automatically, he had gone back to the professional attitude. But the professional air stopped there.

"I — I —— Yes. I came here straight from Durban. I saw — Greg — I ——"

"*When* did you see him?" The American came a step closer. "I tell you I'm to be the next one after he's taken! How was he? You can't wonder that I want to *know!*"

Hammerstone's hand still clung to his chin, his eyes going 'round and 'round, then fixing like an imbecile's.

The big man caught his arm. "Come out of this dream! Tell me how he was!"

"He — appeared normal — when I saw him." But that was the limit of Hammerstone's capacity: with the last word, he tore himself from the big man and plunged into the crowd which blocked the windows commanding the suddenly dark street.

"When I saw him." The big man kept saying Hammerstone's words over and over. Something had happened. He knew — or felt that he knew that Greg could not already have been *claimed* for Anne or the Netherbys

would have wired immediately. So what ——? As he crossed the room and skirted the edge of the crowd to make the doorway, a man was saying:

"Where's Clavering? Just leaving, you say? Tell him he mustn't. There's a cracking storm blowing up, and he'd best stay inside!"

"He's started already," some one called. "Saw him go. Gad! what a flash!" He was right: for an instant the room seemed full of putty-faced images, and itself on fire. The puff of a giant flashlight set for the taking of some vast picture! A crash rocked the house. Then, flash and sound were gone.

"Better not, if you ask me," some one said to the big man, as he turned from the door: "it's nasty out there, for even here!"

A second crash drowned the words and showed him the door-knob, and the lightning, shimmery and unbelievably bright, hung on the path ahead. Immediately before him, he saw another figure, seemingly as heedless as himself of the dazzle and incredible cannonade. "Clavering," thought the big man. "Whoever that is," he supplied in the next suspense between shattering crashes, "the man those two were saying ought not to have started out." In the black gloom and the descending almost-solid of water, he could see nothing — seemed blind; then the eerie night would be turned into far more eerie day, and he would see the tall, lean, erect, young figure stalking on as before, resolute to the point of open defiance, grandly arrogant.

The big man was gaining, but increased his stride: he felt that he must overtake the other at once. He walked

still faster, ran in upon him; at a rod's distance waited a crash, then burst his voice through:

"Clavering!"

The man turned the brown face seen at the club.

Then, something broke in the sky and hit the man in his brown face, to fasten forever that frank smile of greeting on the memory of the big man who staggared up in time to catch the rigid body in his arms.

Too late to save him, he knew, as the glare played on him, and the brimstone suffocated him, and the volcanic vibrations almost brought him down! And he thought with sadness of that fine, brave, arrogant, young, gone life: the pity it was that he himself, with his hell, could not have been struck down, and Clavering, the man with the happy world, allowed to live!

He said that to the men he carried Clavering's body back to, at the club, then left them, without reply, to reënter the glittering tumult.

"The shack, first," he said to himself, "then the train to Durban."

CHAPTER XXX

DURBAN

SUDDENLY, some time in the third night, he reached it, and flung himself to the platform, for which he had searched through the intervening miles. Searched? Had he not watched, staring motionless from the window, seeing nothing, all his senses turned into the single one of striving to *feel* the approach to Durban? He had come almost without luggage; and did not wait for what he had.

With a thrill of pleasure which mocked his knowledge he passed on upward through the familiar streets. He had thought to try Greg at the Regent first. But even the club was dark, when he reached it; and he understood, as he stared at his watch: it was nearly three. Too late to telephone Greg even from the public booth! And he turned toward the rooms which he still called his.

He was right in his denomination: the woman, who let him in and welcomed him from her refuge in the darkness, told him that he might go up at once. She had expected him.

He turned, halfway up. Had Mr. Bradbroke asked for him?

The woman was silent, reflecting. He could see her dim outline behind the lamp.

Yes, Mr. Bradbroke had come once. The morning afterward.

"After what?"

"After you went away, sir."

"But only once? Didn't he ask where I'd gone and when I'd be back?"

No, he had not done either. He had come once, and gone away. That was some time ago. She was sure he had not come again.

"Good-night," he said, from the landing. And, as he climbed the second flight, he thought, "I wonder who told him where I'd gone. He must have found out at once to have gone away so satisfied. He must have known even before I wrote him that first letter from Kimberley." He still believed that Greg had not yet been taken, "for," he said to himself as he had said before, "Anne and the Netherbys would have wired me if anything had happened to him. My letters to him of course told them where I was." This reasoning satisfied him that Greg had not died yet. But, as the big man felt for the knob of his door, in the dark hallway, he went back to his first question — who had told Greg before that first letter from Kimberley. The rickshaw "boy," probably.

Well, the morning would tell. Once in the doorway, he scatched a match, lifted it, and looked around.

If he had expected to find any communication from Bradbroke, he was disappointed, for no envelope broke the surface of the narrow, baize-covered table. He saw the worn, comfortable furniture welcoming him, urging peace . . . the pictures, the familiar hangings; the crisp, cool rugs; the book-shelves; the steins on the mantel;

the ash-trays and matches, waiting, ready as always, for his hand. How good it was to be back! How familiar! By heaven! he might have come in from the absence only of an hour! And he sighed, as he turned the key in the lock, making doubly sure his seclusion with these mute things, which told him that they had not changed.

He went to the window, and the soundless swell of the Indian Ocean welcomed him back. It, too, had been waiting; only last night, or, at longest the night before that, it had breathed on him. Would nothing dispel the delusion that he had not been away? Then, his eyes groped into their old direction — the Netherbys', and that told him. With a groan, he turned from the window: yes, he had been away.

"Morning!" he cried out, in his heart. "Morning!" The bed groaned under the bulk so suddenly launched on it. "Sleep," he begged. "Sleep!" And sleep, at last, and, at last morning, came.

He was grateful for the blessing which had sealed his lids until hours after sunrise: he had required that oblivion. But, when he realized that he had slept seven hours — it lacked only a little of eleven — he mourned wasted time, rushed through his shaving and exercises, then briefest breakfast at the little café — unchanged and thus another denial of his absence — and was through almost instantly, and paying the check at the door.

"No," the stout little proprietor said, rubbing his hair back from his serene eyes, "Mr. Bradbroke has not been there in three months." He appealed to his wife, as he shot home the change drawer of the cash-register.

"Not in three months, Mr. Ormsby," she echoed regret-

fully. She too, was fair-haired, a German. "Or," she smiled, in her large, friendly way, "Mr. Paxton or Mr. Chadwell. Or Mr. Fraser or Mr. Carstairs," she went on, parading their names as an inducement for return of their patronage. A little yard had been bought, now, behind, and tables were put out, in fine weather. It was very comfortable. He could see it, she said, from the window. He did see it: the tables were already out, each set off into squares with white stones. The woman went on:

"If you should see Mr. Bradbroke and Mr. ——"

He swung through the door, followed a little space by the guttural, friendly voices, as he faced away toward the bungalow.

A thousand things crowded his thoughts, as he followed the way, among them that he should make the best explanation he could to Greg and then propitiate Anne, forgetting her injustice, and remembering that she held him an unfeeling adventurer, whom she had rated much too highly, or a monster of cruelty whom she could not rate too low. . . . And Greg would help him in this. If he could see Greg for a moment before having to face Anne ——

He had walked very swiftly, and the crunch of gravel under his feet interrupted him. He passed through the gate, and still more swiftly up the drive. He raised his eyes, and his heart leaped. He stood motionless on the piazza. The last time that he had stood there —— Oh, he knew that she had gone at his entreaty: he had stood on the dock-head and seen her go. Yet, once, he had stood here and told her his love for her and kissed her as he held her in his arms. Great God in heaven ——

The sound of a step sent him rigid. No need for his heart to wait: it was a servant, whom he did not recognize.

"Mr. Ormsby," the man echoed, "to see Mr. Bradbroke, sir?"

"Mr. Bradbroke or Mrs. Bradbroke. Either one of them."

"Beg pardon, sir. Mr. and Mrs. Bradbroke went home three months ago."

"England?" Just the one word.

"Three months, sir. The place is to be let, sir. Might be you would care to see it: twenty acres, and the outbuildings, and ——"

The big man turned, without a word, down the drive. The thing for him to do was to see the Netherbys. The demented mutterings which he had just listened to meant nothing. He should tell Lady Netherby that he had been at Kimberley and written Greg from there. Just say that he "had written." There would be no need of saying that he had written twice. And she would tell him where Greg and Anne were and why they had given up the bungalow.

There the house was now!

For an instant, at his first sight of it, he reflected that the Netherbys too might have gone. But a second, and closer, scrutiny reassured him: the lattices leaned; and the note of a song fell softly on his ear. In another moment he had mounted the steps to stand mute, for the name ZELIG stared at him on a new, brass plate, on the door.

"Zelig?" he asked dully. "*Zelig?*" Was he as mad as *that?*

"Madame Zelig," a voice said. "You don't remember?"

The doorway had suddenly framed Catherine Hetheridge, smiling impersonally, with her old, characteristic abstraction. And there was more curiosity than invitation in her, "Come in?"

"All the world's gone mad," he confided studying her sullenly.

"And you've only just discovered that?" she derided. "The madame's out. You may as well come in." She might have been a servant, and he an intimate, a relative, or an enemy. "I've expected you," she went on, as remotely as ever. She came a step closer, no longer aloof. "You didn't know they'd gone?" He seemed hardly to hear. "They've all gone, Anne, Greg, and the Netherbys — all of them."

"When?" he demanded.

She reflected, or seemed to reflect, her handsome head supported, as, on the first evening, by her beautifully rounded arm. "I think it was the next day or two after you left — Durban."

He ignored her calculated pause, and said nothing. There was nothing he could say. There was little enough that he could think — beyond the still unbelievable fact that Greg could have gone without telling him, and, even above that, gone to ——

Catherine followed his thoughts. "It's singular that he didn't write you." Then, suddenly, "What made you come back?"

"I saw Hammerstone. It was at Kimberley." He nodded his head slowly to himself. "I went there from here. I'd been there ever since. Hammerstone acted as if something had happened, down here." He kept his

eyes on her because she chanced to be standing directly in front of him. "Greg didn't tell me that he had gone, or was going. He — I had not word from him." Again, he nodded to himself. Then as if suddenly becoming aware of her. "I was back living where I was before, in the sheet-iron shack at — Kimberley."

It may have been his simplicity and strength. It may have been his reference to the shack of sheet-iron. Or it may have been his listlessness, which, in such a man, told, as nothing else could have told, his suffering. But whatever the cause, the tears welled to the lashes of her strange eyes.

"Don't! oh, don't!" she pleaded. "Why don't you tell me what it is? I know that you loved each other. No," as his hand went out, "why *shouldn't* I say it? It's the greatest glory of her life, though she went away!"

He looked down at her: "She went because I asked her to. There was no other way."

Eyes wide, she started back. "You don't mean, you can't mean, that ——?"

He shook his head wearily. "Not that or anything like it, though I am barred as effectually."

Joy filled her eyes.

"I am glad, glad, glad!" Her hands pressed her face, covering the strange eyes, now wonderously softened. "Ah!" she cried again, "I am *glad!*"

Motionless as a statue, he inclined his head.

"Thanks," he said, in a monotone so lifeless that it would have killed her, if she had cherished even the most trifling illusion regarding him: "it's no end good of you."

He turned toward the door. "Mighty glad to have seen you," he began.

She dashed aside his abstraction. "Yes, *let's* go out: I can't stand this, in here." She led the way to the hall, and caught up a sunshade. "Come," she said, "off somewhere, where we can talk!"

He had seen her like this only once before; and, as they descended to the path, which followed the drive, he lifted his thoughts to her laboriously from the dream into which he had been settling. So that it was with something like his old manner that he held the gate for her, stepping back for her to pass.

"It hit me," he said; "I mean, when I found they'd gone. I wanted — you know," he went on with an almost boyish earnestness. "I've been away so long, and I wanted to hear them talk of Her. I wanted to ask them about Her. You don't know what it would have meant — what it means to me to talk with *you* of Her," he finished, still blindly, unwittingly merciless.

"Yes," she said, "of course." She loved him so much that, if, to talk of the young, English girl helped him, she stood ready to endure. "Yes," she said again, after a little. And, again, after another interval, through which his words flowed on, "Yes." She wondered, as she heard him resume, what she had done to suffer so. Eyes downcast, sad as his own, she carried her graceful height beside him, walking, as, but a short time before, he had stood — in a dream.

Suddenly, she realized that the timbre of his voice had altered. "I beg your pardon," he was saying quickly and guardedly, "but — that large woman, there, in the

carriage!" He filled his pause in with a gesture. "I think she wants to speak to you."

Catherine leaned as if something had struck her. "Yes, yes," she repeated, after one look in the direction he gave her. "Yes," she said still again. She was standing uncertainly.

They waited. The large woman had stopped her carriage and was leaning toward them.

"Miss Hetheridge!" That was all. But her heavy-lidded, cloudy eyes were confident. And she was so gross, so uncouth, so unimaginably vulgar. "Catherine," she said, with intimacy.

The big man stepped closer to the girl. "Don't worry, though of course I know who she is," his big shoulder at Catherine's side seemed to say.

Perhaps she heard its promise of protection, for her face flamed. She drew away from him. "Shall I drive you home?" he heard her ask the bearded giantess in the ornate carriage. "Now?"

Catherine was following her voice to the side of the carriage, but the big hand, which went with the big shoulder, deliberately swept her back. "Drive on," the American told the coachman with crude, irresistible directness. And the man drove on.

She wheeled on him. "That was Madame Zelig: It means ——" Her eyes were wide.

He shook his head slowly. "It means that you'll never see her again. Once I offered you enough money to take you to England and let you live the rest of your life there, and you wouldn't take it. This time, you're going to. Cry, if you want to, for it won't make any difference how

many of these people here see you: you'll be gone on the steamer by midnight, and never'll see any of them again!"

His voice was very deep and kind, as kind as the strong hand which patted her shoulder as if she had been a weeping child. "You go to the Bams', now," he went on. "Lady Bam's all right and you'll never see much of her either. Tell her you've been left a pot of money. I'll get it, and bring it in shape you can easily carry. The Bams'll take you to the boat to-night."

She looked at him, her lips moving.

"You'll never see me again, after it," he went on, very straight out and simple, "so you needn't feel any embarrassment; or obligation either: I'll be done with this world inside six months."

There was nothing to make him understand the tremor which wrung her shoulders.

"Run along to the Bams' now. Come! No, you'd better go alone. I'll be along, just to say good-bye to *them*, and find you there. That'll be just half an hour from now."

And he left her standing, tall, slight, and shaken, before she could deny a word.

He judged rightly that she must be given no time to recover herself; and he made the bank quickly, drawing out, in the most easily portable form, what he designed for her. So that it was not half an hour, but a quarter, when he was received by Lady Bam, and, pleading an immediate duty at Kimberley, completed his farewells. As he rose to go, he shook hands, all 'round.

The girl's face was drawn, as he stood before her, saying lightly:

"By the way, this will give you a good idea of my house up there: some reporter's got it in here. Just a cut, but it shows it." He gave her a folded newspaper. . . . "Look it over, when you've time. Good-bye."

She drew back, for the first time understanding the mode of transfer he had selected. "I ——" She shook her head.

He almost laughed, as he caught her hand and forced her slender fingers about the thick paper. "I told you I'd give it to you, and I always keep my word."

Then he was gone, after a last word to the amused Lady Bam, who had always liked him, finding him, as she was so fond of saying, "so simple and strong and picturesque."

And, in her room of Lady Bam's lending, the girl sat dry-eyed. She saw not the fortune, which had come to her from the one man in the world from whom she could have accepted it, but a smudgy woodcut of a shack of sheet-iron on the outskirts of Kimberley, and, from the smudgy cut, to a note, which read:

"By taking this, and going back to England, you make happier the few weeks or months of life which remain to me."

It was not signed. There was no need of signature. She bent her head, and raised the note to her lips.

CHAPTER XXXI

ADRIFT

HE HAD written her that her acquiescence made him happier. But he scanned the paper next morning, with an uncertainty which amounted to anxiety; and his relief tarried until he found her name in the list of those who had sailed, the midnight before, for home.

It was done, then. And he threw the paper from him satisfied.

How strange it was, he thought, that he had kept his word, now, all 'round: he had promised Her to help Greg and Anne so that they could marry and go back to England; he had promised *himself* that he would secure Her own escape from South Africa; and he had told Catherine Hetheridge that he would give her money enough to take her, too, back there and let her *live* instead of riveting her bondage to the Jewess, Madame Zelig, by marriage with Beaconsfield Zelig, the Jew. All these promises were now facts accomplished: he had kept his word.

And, because there was some comfort, even to him, in this, he could dwell on Greg's evacuation from a new, and, he felt, a saner, viewpoint. . . . At least, that return, however unheralded to himself, now seemed far less unaccountable. For, after all, why should not Greg have gone. It was perfectly consistent with all that he had

done since his marriage, yes, with the fact of the marriage itself: he was *still* living, and, while he lived, *lived for the present.* The certainty of the Fate, which gaped for him, and would soon attain him, had made him utterly desperate; and this desperation had given his weak nature almost the semblance of hardihood:

It was as if Greg had said: "I'll do as I like until YOU come for me!" It was sheer madness, one with the splendid arrogance of that fine, brown-faced, dead, young Clavering, who, like another not more confident in his strength, had dared, with the same result, the darts of Jove. But it was Greg's way. And, as he reviewed it, the big man saw that he himself had been hardly less defiant: he had deserted and left open to danger Gregory Bradbroke, The Man Between. Moreover, he could not blame Greg for going without warning him, for, before that, he himself had gone without warning, and, even had made a secret of his refuge. He had been two weeks at Kimberley before writing that letter which, with the one that had followed it, had been forwarded, in Durban's slow course of business, to Greg in England. That meant three weeks more before Greg had received it; and another three weeks or four before an answer could come, even if sent at once. Yes, Greg's desertion and silence were clearing up now. Probably a letter from Greg was waiting for him now, at Kimberley.

He started within the hour. It had taken only a small part of that hour to find a purchaser for the Australian wool business, at the price at which the big man offered it. After that, he had seen his bankers, and given Kimberley again, as the address to which his mail should be forwarded.

But no letter waited him from Greg. Nothing. And if he had counted on finding Kimberley endurable, one glance showed him the truth! Not even the shack of sheet iron now was within his power, he saw after nights and days of denials.

What was the use of denying?

"None," he said to himself at last, "for me, none in this world."

"Where now?" he asked of the stars which gemmed the vault, arching limitless over him. Then, he turned back into the sheet-iron shack, and closed the door. Far into the night, by the flickering, paraffine lamp, he wrote to Her, page on page, over which he traced the never-to-be-told story of his love. Far on into the night, to the morning, to be hardly aware that he had ceased writing, when umJacobi came, timidly to wake him, bowed over the story he had told.

"Letters, chief," said the Zulu to the big man.

"Letters?" Then, he caught them to him, held them — until his mad hope died: they were not from Her, but *Greg!*

There were many of them. It seemed that, once Greg had begun writing, his need of communicating with the American had leaped, full-grown. And he arranged them according to their dates of transmission, and read them slowly through:

The first one was headed "Durban," and dated the night Greg had found that the American had gone away. It was as close to conversation as any letter could hope or dread being, for it dwelt, in detail, on things immaterial. Moreover, it came back and back and back to the fact

of the big man's desertion as a thing incredible. Then, plunge after plunge into the inevitable result of the writer's now being left alone. And, through all and in all, the question, soon a desperate demand, to know where the American was, and when he should return.

The next letter had been written next day, and was even more incoherent than the first: the same mad reiteration, now ending:

"I can't even mail these, for I don't know where you *are!*"

In the next letter, Greg wrote that they were going to England. It might be that he could last long enough to get there. He could form no opinion — naturally. But Durban, now, was not to be thought of. They were all going, he and Anne and the Netherbys.

The next letter, written nearly a month later, told of their arrival — just the bare fact of it, then resuming:

"But still no word! In God's name, Ormsby, tell me where you are! I can't think that the order's been changed, and that you've gone ahead of *me.*"

This, in varying phraseology, had constituted the letter. He said nothing of England, nothing of the Netherbys, hardly a syllable of Anne. Nothing of any happiness at their return to the land they had sighed for so long. And the big man understood. Though back in England, and living for the present with his genuine or marvellously portrayed bravado, Greg was *waiting*, too.

The next letter had been written just after receiving Ormsby's first letter, from Kimberley, and was full of remorse and bitterness: what must he have seemed, when his defection was known! He had gone to England be-

cause he could not stay longer in Durban, no, not one hour longer! He knew, now, that he had been beside himself. But England had seemed the only place left. Couldn't he see that?

And the big man, as he read, inclined his head, mutely. Yes, he understood:

"You will wait for it in Kimberley, then. And there as well as anywhere. Certainly as well as in England! England? At times, I wish to God I were back there in Durban, that I had never gone from there! For even here I can see only that Fiend who has wrecked us, Jem, Hugh, Brett Paxton, and Carstairs, picturing the inevitableness of my Fate to me — showing me all that I have lost!"

On, on, he had written, paragraph following paragraph, each more over-wrought and wild, until the certainty of his Doom seemed to have bred in him a very ecstasy, such as was Fleeetwood's through his dreams of Everlasting Fire.

"Write me whatever you can. When you have ceased to hear from me, you may know that I have *gone!*"

He had indeed become an exhortor, for confession and acceptance of his doom earned no relief for him:

"It is inexorable and sure. There is no escape," he said in his next letter. "Nor are we granted the balm of disbelief. For the four who have gone, who already know peace, are sufficient answer even to us, who would bribe ourselves, if we could, to doubt, that, in this year of Grace Nineteen Hundred and Thirteen, a Curse has come! Where is its Seat?" he had gone on, his very handwriting a gesture in the tenseness of his arm." By heaven, I see in this, sometimes, a Warning to our race, short from the hateful, hating heart of Africa! Yet a warning to our-

selves only, more sinister from Its surety that our brothers shall not profit by our suffering. For who would believe us, Ormsby, if we shouted our secret to the skies? No one. We should be known for the madmen we are, made mad by a truth which the Sane cannot understand. We should say,

"'Death is fast on us.' And we should be answered:

"'Death surely, since you are human and alive!'

"'No,' we should deny then, 'not that death: one leaping closer and faster!'

"'Then, when shall you die,' they would ask us. And we should define our delusion by replying:

"'Now, to-day, to-morrow, a week, a month, a year!' And our narrative of those four who had preceded us, instead of earning *belief*, would establish our *complicity!*"

So ended the letter, as if mankind's incredulity had become the keenest disappointment, almost, of the writer's life. And there was truth in that dementia-won contention, the big man admitted to himself: their secret must be kept theirs as surely as their fate was theirs. All else, including the hour of Its coming, was uncertainty.

Be it so, then, he thought, as he restored the last of the letters to its envelope. And of what use was it to him to stay longer at Kimberley? To work? No for work implied the upbuilding of that he worked on; and upbuilding presupposed a to-morrow definitely to be his, and he had not that. Not work, but wandering, then! There were lands that he had never visited, and he would go to them. They could profit him nothing beyond the wearing out of the uncertain days which remained to him. But that would be infinite solace. For he felt very weary,

old even. He seemed to be looking dimly back on his reft youth and dead hopes from the viewpoint of dreary centuries.

He would go out, now, go where he would in the world, give himself to the current and let it carry him where it might. And, in determining this, he told the change which, by subtle and easy degrees, had metamorphosed him; he had elected to do what, six months back, he had scorned others for doing; he would now live only for the present — *drift.*

CHAPTER XXXII

WITH THE CURRENT

CHANGED though he was, he did not give himself to the Current until he had emptied the shack of sheet iron of what he wished to take with him, and idly told to what next point, Durban, his mail should be forwarded. He meant the letters from Tom and Janet. Greg's letters, he felt, would follow him automatically.

Then he entered a carriage of the first train south and east, his next stop and first real point of departure — since it was an extensive port — Cape Town.

Arrived there, he looked up the various sailings. First, the White Star:

"Natal to London via Cape Town and Plymouth.		Natal to Australia via Cape Town.
Durban to London about		
Dec. 23rd.	S. S. *Africa*, 11,984 tons	March 3rd.
Jan. 20th	. . . . .	April 1st.
Feb. 17th	. . . . .	Dec. 8th."

and so on down to:

"THROUGH FARES TO NEW YORK, BOSTON, PHILADELPHIA or BALTIMORE quoted on application."

And he wondered how he had been able to read it so idly, as he went on:

"Accommodation for one class of Passengers only. Fares from Natal to London or Plymouth, from eighteen to twenty-four Guineas; from

Cape Town to Australia, from fifteen Guineas. Accommodation is of superior description and unusually spacious, including Reading and Smoking Rooms. Experienced Surgeon and Stewardess.

WM. COTTS & Co., Agents,
Natal Bank Buildings, Durban.

Or to Messrs ————."

But he read no more: the single word, "Durban," had settled the White Star Line for him: he was going to try to forget, to live for the present, and that word of six letters would remind him!

He turned to the Rennie Line, which promised,

"On or about
Jan. 2d. S. S. *Inyoni* (Inter 2,000 tons), Capt. P. J. Jackman."

But he dropped it, for it concluded:

"MARCONI SYSTEM OF WIRELESS TELEGRAPH. Installed on board *Inanda* and *Inkosi*. Passengers can thereby communicate with friends on shore before arrival in England."

No, not that, for it would be only irresistible temptation which he must not put himself in the way of: he would not see Greg and Anne and the Netherbys if it could be avoided, and to be so near to Her —— Then, too, it had been the steamship *Inanda* that he and Greg had waited by, the night when Carstairs, instead of coming to sail to the Cape with them, had *gone;* and, still more unescapably reminiscent he found the name of her sister ship, for *Inkosi* was a synonym of umFundize, and that Fiend had said, that night at the Regent:

"You, umFundize, will be the last to die of those now sitting within this room!"

So he crumpled the folders of the White Star and the Rennie, and sailed on the German East African Line, tak-

ing the Eastern route, which should carry him to Beira, Chinde, Mozambique, Zanzibar, Dar-es-Salaam, Tanga, Mombasa (Kilindini), Aden, Suez, Port Said, Naples, Marseilles, Tangiers, Lisbon, Southampton, Flushing, and Hamburg.

He read each word of the long list lingeringly. Surely, he thought, the release which now tarried so obstinately, must lurk there in one of them!

And yet Beira gave him only the friendship of a stranded white man, who, for the fortnight the American hung there, watched the strong, sympathetic face with the adoration of a dog. And Chinde, though he lagged there a month, between boats, bore nothing but horror for those who stayed there voluntarily. Mozambique. Another month he sought to strike from his memory. Zanzibar, he could endure only for a fortnight. Dar-es-Salaam was brighter and far more picturesque, yet it, together with Tanga and Mombasa, revealed nothing, and totalled only six weeks. He idled twice that at Aden. Suez spelled a gainless fortnight. Port Said for the same period, and void as the rest. Naples, Marseilles, Tangiers, Lisbon — he fled soon, smiling and lovely as they were. Southampton and Flushing — how he longed for the weakness to abandon his oath and unfitness for her love and follow her! He was grateful when the steamer resumed her course and, at last, liberated him at Hamburg.

Here, at his hotel, his mail caught up with him: a long letter from Tom, with Janet's writing on the envelope. But he contented himself with a swift glance that read they were well, for the other letters were from Greg. All, too, in the same tenor: he had had only the Kimberley

letters. Was he still there? Or had he gone back to America?

"By the time you receive this," ended the second of the four letters, "my turn will have come. Ormsby, Ormsby, it will be harder than ever for me to go now, for, besides leaving Anne, there will be ——"

And the big man lowered the page reverently. Greg had written of a child. The letter went on:

"Through every medium except words, you urged me against marriage; and now, though a long year's gone since it, you say, as you read this, that you were right. But you were wrong then, and you are wrong now: for once your calm logic has gone awry! From the first, I believe that I have envied you, deliberate, self-contained and strong. But, though you are still powerless to realize it, or to understand me, your very strength has misled you. Love, if you had ever known it, would have enlightened you!"

"Love," said the big man to himself, slowly. But he smiled, for he knew, now, that his secret and Hers was safe from Greg, who, though he had heard Anne's denunciation *that day*, at the dock-head in Durban, had not believed. Fears of the contrary had assailed him. He had known that She and Anne must meet, that, long before this, they had revived the association which they too had treasured so. But now there would be conjectures and questionings only on Anne's part. Marian would be spared the anguish of Greg's congratulatory sympathy. And, by this time —— Not even yet could he bring himself to voice it; yet he told himself that his oath should not falter, and that Youth was still hers and that even a year, to Youth, was very long. And, even assuming — and his heart leaped, though he defined nothing — his

time would come soon, heralded by a delayed and heart-broken letter from Anne, or, more probably, from Lady Netherby, telling him that Greg had died.

Through the seemingly endless days and nights, which rolled on over him, in the German city, he wondered where that letter would find him, from whence come to him. And, once that letter had come, where should he go from it? Not that that mattered much! For his doom would detect him, here, there, or elsewhere that he might crawl to on the world, like a fly creeping on a schoolroom globe!

What was the use of this endless pursuit of he knew not what? That was it: "What was the use of it?"

He was essentially a solitary, by this time. Before, he had been, in comparison, merely utterly lonely, meeting no one a second time, abandoning his lodgings for another, as soon as sympathy, or interest, or curiosity led others to attempt to penetrate his solitude.

And, though he hardly realized it, those who came on him pondered him: who he was; what he was; the big, fine-faced, sad-eyed, evanescent American. And they would have done what they could for him, if they had known what came, one day, without warning, and struck him down: Greg had written it: She had married. She was very happy. He and Anne and the Netherbys were delighted. Greg supposed he would write to her, and so gave the place where *they* were going to spend the next month or two. "One of his places," Greg commented. This Heaven-on-Earth was somewhere in the north of Scotland. Anne had seen it, and it was very beautiful.

"Tell her I wish her every happiness," the big man

wrote Greg. Then, he mailed the letter with his own hands, and awaited Greg's answer with the devotion of one who could hope for the denial of a thing irreparable.

He waited. Until now he had forgotten that Greg had known no address since Kimberley; and that, since writing this letter, which, like the rest, had been so successively forwarded, Greg, like himself, might have altered his address repeatedly. And, though he knew, the next instant, that Anne's health would forbid this continuous voyaging, he clung to the illusion with increasing tenacity, as day followed day, and no letter came.

Then his letter was returned to him, a note with it. Somehow, even before he opened it, he divined its message and knew that it was from Lady Netherby.

Very suddenly, the day before, *Greg had died.*

That night, from quiet Hamburg, in which the big man had drifted and found shelter for six months, he sailed for America.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AMERICA

IT HAD come very stealthily, his sudden realization that America was the one place left for him. But though a realization, he found it most difficult to define. He ascertained this only after the steamer had sailed, and he knew that he was going to what once had been home to him, across that gray and soundless sea. For it was soundless: the night was calm; only the serene voices of the soft-breasted sea-wanderers, the tireless undulations of water, swinging in to meet and lift smoothly the bulk of the liner, then slide from under and pass on behind her, offered any sound.

The seas soothed him with a thousand promises, until he felt the call which had been — and must ever be — so irresistible to many of the troubled ones of the world. What was it, he asked himself, hour after hour. Did the waters understand him and his need? Did they pity him? And were they offering themselves as a means of escape from his suffering?

He had much time in which to ponder this; but his pondering won him no solution. At best, only a theory, which he accepted impersonally: it was not the waves, which spoke to him, but his own heart, telling him that he should soon leave the world, and that this green, tranquil ocean would afford a swift and painless death. And,

though the thought of suicide had been hateful to him before, he could consider the step, now, with a mind fair and free from prejudice. He knew that he had gained this viewpoint only upon the coming of those two letters, which had told of Her marriage and of Bradbroke's death. How little the writers had dreamed what those letters would mean to him, make of him! Well, Greg was past knowing, and Lady Netherby would never know.

Then, his reverie changed: not even suicide was open to him, for he had written his name clear and distinct on the steamer's register, and She must hear of it if he gave himself to the sea. And no death was so absolute, and no ocean so deep, but that he should feel how far he had fallen in her regard.

So he would not give himself to this cool, piling, rising, receding water, which called to him. She must live on untrammelled by thoughts of him in her safe, serene, English home. Already dead to her, he must insure his ceasing to be even a memory.

Obedient to the decree of this strange loyalty, he made his way. It was an outré, abnormal way. Now that she was another's and that Bradbroke was dead, his brief future stretched a colourless waste ahead of him. It had been that before, but Greg's letter had killed it all over again. Somewhere, invisible, yet near, Fraser, Chadwell, Paxton, the singer, Carstairs, and now Gregory Bradbroke, waited his coming, the five who had gone before.

It seemed to him, sometimes, that he saw them, but he knew that these intimate visions were only hallucinations, the creatures of his harried brain. And yet they were startlingly clear, as clear as that room at the Regent Club,

as clear, almost, as the face and the words of the Fiend who had ruined him, converted him, distorted, and disorganized him, whose lips seemed speaking, unceasingly, in his very ear. Hammerstone, too, as he came back, after caring for Frazer. Hammerstone bothered the big man: he was so eternally coming back to say they must realize that it was only a coincidence, and that the interment would be at three o'clock. At other times, Hammerstone, without becoming less clear in his eternal entry into the room at the Regent, was trying to hide himself in the crowd in the club at Kimberley. Clavering, too, brown-faced and eager, was telling the crowd of the frank, free, open life on the high veldt:

"Nothing like it in the world! No, nothing like it in the world!" Then, Clavering was always going out into the storm, and being killed by lightning. It was too bad. Clavering had had a good, straight pair of eyes, and a brown face, and had seemed in the very top of condition. Young, too. Yes, it was too bad. Yet Clavering's going off that way had showed how uncertain life was even when spared any irremediable curse. It had served in *that* way! And through all and in all, and closer immeasurably than all to the big man, Her words, and the touch of her, that moment at the bungalow, when they had spoken the truth to each other, there and on the steamer, her love, her face, her tears, her longing to stay and meet with him whatever his unspoken fate might be!

That was what he lived on, as the steamer told off the miles, piling them up between him and the land which he had left. He should never go back, never again see England. The end should find him somewhere in America!

But he knew, for all that, that *to* the end he should see only Her and South Africa.

And, while Durban stared, closer ever and closer, his steamer climbed the harbour and made her dock at New York!

Yes, it was New York. For past streamed the crowds on both sidewalks, every now and then overflowing into the gutters to meet in the middle of the street. A nervous clang cleared the way temporarily for an ambulance, in whose back lazed an impassive attendant, incongruously immaculate in his white duck; then, the crowd closed in again, the morbid trying to see what lay crumpled on the stretcher at the attendant's farther side. Men, women, children with Sphinx-like, far-peering faces which, not even on the day of their birth, could have suggested joy or youth! Cars slued in, solid with the same parodies on humanity, native-born it might be, yet with the features of their parent immigrants. By Heaven, he seemed looking into the steerage of a ship! A Jew, an auctioneer's "puller-in," barked from a doorway: the watches being offered for sale were stock unredeemed from pawnbrokers, he lied. Two Italian pigmies kicked a box to pieces, to tie and drag the fragments with their shrewd, small hands, while their mother waited, a stolid statue, an hundred and fifty pounds of stolen timber on her head! Newsboys screamed like gulls over refuse! Every manner of vehicle, electric, horse, and human, filed by with every manner of prey for the maw of the multitude! The city roared! Yes, it was his world, so plain and palpable that his Fate seemed only a mirage, imaginary and non-existent, conjured up by himself. His predicament? His bondage?

His inevitable end? Had he not, after all, dreamed them? And should he not find, in a moment, that only their Unreality was Real? Then, he felt again the Japanese Netsuki — the one thing he had bought at Dar-es-Salaam — wrought by patient, brown fingers with a skill as old as Time; and he knew that, though he was walking a familiar street, in the dear, old city, he *was* held by his Doom and held hopelessly, for the evidence of it was stamped on his very heart.

. . . . . .

It was so: first in New York, and then in Boston, which he soon fled to, the men who welcomed him, importuning him back to his old life, were not so tangible to him as Fraser and Chadwell and the singer and Carstairs and Bradbroke! These old friends, this world he had confidently thought should be his his life through, were no longer his. Or, rather, he saw them all over an impassible barrier. Each day, he knew this more indubitably, and soon began to withdraw from them, for they sought to come between him and his dreams. Then, because they became insistent, he left them. He was going away. For how long? He made the best he could with that, for how could he tell them that he should never meet any one of them again!

"Across to that other ocean, to the Pacific," he said to himself, its sole recommendation its distance and the fact that, beside it, he should know no one who might infringe his solitude.

But he ran into the Boydens' before he had been in

Pasadena an hour. And Tom Kennerley and his wife pinned him down to a dinner, a week after he had settled himself in San Francisco. Portland for a month seemed a safe haven, but then Greymouth Crew, hungry for news of the East, seized on him gratefully.

It was enough: he would try the wilderness; and, heedless of those who warned him that it was the wrong season, he went hopefully into the far distant North, where he revelled, half-heartedly in the hunting, until Crandall, 1901, staggered, half-frozen, into his shack. Nome had been no better than the others! Even the wilderness had failed!

"Still another country, then," he told himself listlessly. And, with the red-brown of his three months of Alaskan winter on his firm cheeks, he dropped down to Victoria.

CHAPTER XXXIV

VICTORIA

VERY neat, very quaint, very quiet, very English, the little city appealed to him. Feeling its peace, and noting its modest pretensions, he wondered how he could have hesitated even as long as he had between it and Seattle. Here, he could suffer no interruption. He settled himself in easily gained lodgings, and told himself that he had found the right place at last:

"I'll stand it out here. Now that Greg's gone, it can't be long." He said it confidently. And, accepting Its imminence, he made the necessary preparations, with his characteristic quietude and thoroughness. He had given his New York and Boston addresses to the clerk of the little, private hotel; and he now amplified these by appending the names of his three living relatives, together with indication where they might most readily be found. He wrote such letters as he wished, each a farewell, and each undated, "to be delivered in case of accident to myself." Next, he wrote and mailed at once, letters of more detail — though in no way suggesting his approaching annihilation. These were to Tom and Janet; and even to the little baby, he wrote with eyes gone wet. And, last of all, he burned the letters which, at Durban, at Kimberley, and at every stop since, he had written to the Eng-

lish violet — completing his task gray-faced. In effect and sensation, he had now all but parted from the world of those who lived.

His secret thus buried for all time, and all preparations made for the care of his body, he looked on those about him with an easy tolerance. By day, he kept his rooms with almost stuporic lethargy. By night, he went out and walked for great periods, in the darkness, or, as he soon came to do, rode one of the horses which an adjacent hostler kept in readiness for him. Great strength and rugged health had been his, and should be kept his up to the very end. Always, he had despised men who let themselves get out of condition, just as he had pitied men, who, through lack of ruggedness, had never known what condition was — and, by "condition," the big man meant the glorious vigour of the men on the crew squad — his Harvard days.

He met no one in anything approaching intimacy. From time to time, he came on a face he had seen once or twice before, but that was his nearest step toward acquaintance, to say nothing of anything affording companionship. If he excited interest, it was not gratified. If he roused curiosity, it did not reach his ears. He had been right in estimating that an American in Victoria could preserve his solitude if he would.

And he was accepting this as an unequivocal fact, when, without prelude, it was disproven: far out of the city, one evening, himself riding, he came on a rider fighting for control of an ill-broken horse. One glance showed the horse was winning; the second saw the horse rear and fall backward, pinning the rider under him.

Instantly, the American had reached them, and was off his own mount.

"Not much hurt, I hope," he asked, as he lifted the other in his arms.

"No, just my leg, thanks. All right." The man tested the leg as he spoke. "Jove, makes me feel ——" By way of defining, he steadied himself still more against the big shoulder which was little higher than his own. "Just a moment, then I'll be fit! It's not that I'm done, or anything. The deuce of it is I'm just quit of the hospital. Got a bullet somewhere in this queer leg of mine, and the surgeons have been trying for it again. Ought not to have ridden this devil the first night!" He forced a smile, but his lips were white and he breathed irregularly.

The big man swung his horse around. "I'll put you up, and take you wherever you say to," he said quickly. "Yes," as the other formed a denial: "your beast's bolted, and it's close on midnight. Ten to one no one will be along!"

"But, I can't let you ——"

For answer, the American swung him from the ground to the saddle. "Where?" he asked, beginning to walk by the horse, which he had already turned in the direction of the town.

The other made no answer at first. Clearly, he was shaken more than he realized. But he was not thinking of himself: "I say, this is no end fine of you, old man," he cried frankly, his accent neither wholly English nor entirely American. "And you're right: the leg's no possible good now. Don't know what I'd have done! Staying

on here? Odd I haven't seen you. I'd have remembered, for," with a quick, downward glance of candid admiration, "you're big enough and ——" He broke off, ending, "So, I'd have remembered you."

"Yes, I'm staying on here, as you say," the big man admitted; "but about yourself: Where do you want me to take you to?"

"All right," said the mounted man, with a frank laugh. "And I beg your pardon. If you'll deliver me at the Victoria Club. . . ."

"Where is it?"

"Straight ahead a bit. Hardly a mile, I think. I'll say 'when,' when we come to it. Here," he said, after a period, "this is it, and I guess my leg ——"

But he groaned as he tested it. "You know," as he thrust out his hand for the big man's, "I'm any amount sorry; but ——"

"Better let me take you right in, if you don't mind being thought crippled." And the American carried him up the broad steps and through the door which an attendant held back for them.

"Fine," commended the other gratefully. "Here," to a waiter. "You'll have something? I've got to! This pain's the devil! Two club cocktails!" The waiter dashed away.

The big man looked down. After all, it would be only a moment. And he took the chair placed for him.

His host smiled across, nodding. "Didn't want to, but was persuaded. Don't worry: I'm not full of questions." To prove it, he turned toward where the waiter had raced to. "Can't imagine what's keeping the fellow: club

"The big man stared

cocktails ought not to take half a ——. Here they are!" He pushed one across to the big man, and raised his own. "To *you*, and ——" Then, he stopped, his untasted glass halfway to his friendly, smiling lips. The smile faded. "I say ——" Then his hand slowly went down until the glass clicked on the smooth table's heavy wood.

But neither click nor exclamation moved the man who had forgotten him: fixed as a statue, the American was staring away from him at a man who sat alone at a table on the other side of the wide room. The man was half-turned away. Only his profile was visible. Apparently, he was finishing an elaborate dinner. He seemed of an easy, reflective turn of mind, too, for, though alone, his lips moved, and, from time to time, he smiled. But not once did he turn his head.

And the big man stared on at him, as rigid as the table against which he pressed.

"Drink, for God's sake!" at last breathed his host. "I thought *I* needed it, but *you* ——"

He was granted strange obedience: the big man, without lifting his eyes once from their anchorage, felt for the glass he had set down, and, raising it, drank the strong liquor in panting gulps. Then, his big hand closed on his host's with a grip which bent the bones.

"One day," he said, with an effort, "I'll find you and tell you what you've done for me."

Then, he went across to the man, who still sat, alone and unobservant, at the table on the other side of the room.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE MAN BETWEEN

THE chalk cliffs! But was it really England, he asked himself, as he watched them, from the steamer's bow? For, though he *knew* now, it still seemed a mirage. The transition had been too sudden, too utterly unhoped for, so soon to become credible. He had been at Victoria, in British Columbia, and had met a man in the night there. He had helped the man, and had been at the Victoria Club with him, gone in, and there . . .

An hour after the landing was made, he was saying to Catherine Hetheridge, "I have broken my promise, but forgive me. You will understand ——"

She looked up at him: memorable as he had been always to her, she had not imagined that even he could be like *this*. "*You?*" The marvel held her still.

"I must be received by the Earl of Leighton, as his guest, unannounced, *at once*."

She said, simply, "Yes." Then the eyes, of the strange blue of the soil about Kimberley, swept over him, enfolded him: for one daring moment, she had been able to forget. But for only a moment. She turned from him, thinking only of him. "Have you realized what it will mean? Yes," in the same breath, "I know that you believe that your course is right."

"Right," he cried. "It is as right as that you are here, as you are, instead of obeying the beck and call of an inferior; it is as right as that, after a time, you will have forgotten that any ever bore the name Zelig! Don't," he said, with infinite gentleness touching the hands which her face had gone trembling down to, "it's just that I wanted you to know how glad I am! And now take me to the Earl of Leighton!"

She checked him, her hands at her throat? "Is it a coincidence which has led the Earl and the Countess to entertain whom they do, to-night?"

"It is Fate," he said. "She could be nowhere else in the world, *to-night*."

"Shall I ever see you again?" she asked while they waited, one instant, before the Earl of Leighton's door.

"Yes," he told her.

Then they entered, she to go to the drawing-room and the Countess, he to go where he knew, from the hour it was, that he should find the Earl.

There were in that room, the Earl of Leighton, and three other men, older, gray-haired, grave men with nobly won orders on their breasts. And one was leaning slightly toward his host and the two other guests, saying:

"And it does exist there. I have been there, and seen it for myself. And, I tell you," his fine old eyes sweeping the half circle, "in America, I have seen what, since it is allowed by the authorities, we cannot blame the perpetrators for; but it was a revelation to me. I ——'

"That is it," the smaller, more nervous man next him interrupted. "You define the explanation, Sir Harry: it is yourself. Yes, pardon me, I mean exactly that: you

have never known politics or anything whatever touching the commercial. Since leaving the sea, you have known only the quiet of one of the most beautiful spots in England; and, as a result, any shrewd and unprincipled outreaching for money *is* a revelation, as you just said. Now, in spite of all you have told of America, I venture to say that, right here, in Britain ——"

But the old sailor was not to be put down. "You mistake me," he corrected: "I am not speaking of ordinary sharpness. In the one week I spent in America, I saw what amounted to deliberate *extortion*. Under the British flag, it would have been called ——"

"*Crude*," said a voice from the doorway.

At the words, the Earl, the old sailor, and the two other men turned, so that, at the same instant, they saw him standing straight and tall between the heavy portières.

"Mr. Ormsby," tardily announced the butler, "of America."

He stood very still and silent. At each side were armoured figures, mailed ghosts of the past; but wide and tall as they were, they were dwarfed by the reach and bulk of the American. So that he might well have seemed, to those who beheld him, as silent as he, a reincarnated champion, come to confront them from a bygone world — the illusion so obstinate as to hold them even while he came deliberately toward them, his big-boned face standing out brown against the white front of his evening clothes.

The Duke of Radford turned to the statesman who sat at his right. "I say, Kayting, did you ——?" Then he stopped, for the intruder was now close, saying, as he

seated himself opposite them, "It is my right to tell you why I have come."

Sir Harry Marlton looked from the Earl, who had gone rigid, to the man who ignored the peer so grimly:

"I say, you *can* explain this, of course?" he asked the man from America.

There was nothing hostile in the frank question. They might have been sitting in a club, two big men by themselves, two fighters, one old and the other young, one a sailor and the other a landsman, yet tacitly admitting their congeniality. And the old sailor smiled across to the brown, big-boned face. His own was brown. "I say, Radford," he nodded, "we'd be glad if he'd explain?"

"If you will," said the Duke. "But, first, Leighton, don't you —— I fancy he'd best be offered us."

The Earl's lips moved. But the man from America leaned forward. "Hear me through first," he said, "and let what introductions are needed come afterward. Be patient: every detail shall be cleared up. I am John Ormsby, an American. Ten years ago I completed the academic course at Harvard, my father's college and my grandfather's. By residence, I am most familiar with Boston and New York. I have crossed a continent and an ocean to see the man whose guests you are."

"Very good," interrupted the sailor. "But you said 'crude,' a moment ago. What did you mean by that?"

The American bowed. "I shall tell you." He waited a moment, then began:

"I will take you back a little behind two years. I used to speculate."

The Duke suddenly nodded. "You are *that* John Ormsby?"

"Yes. Wanting a change, a little more than two years back, I went to South Africa — that is to say, to Kimberley. I speculated there," he went on, with the same strong, almost ominous calm, "and won heavily and repeatedly. I had what, even to me, was amazing fortune: I won continuously, never losing, though the probability of loss was about ninety-nine to one. Then a young Englishman, who had wandered into my shack there, asked me to be his guest at Durban for race-week. I had no desire to go, no curiosity about Durban, and I hadn't yet had my fill of Kimberley. But Bradbroke — I believe that I liked him better than I had liked any man whom I had known for so short a time: he was brilliant, though I had not then even begun to suspect him of his one certain attainment; moreover, he was younger than I, by a year or two, and physically far weaker; add to that appeal the glamour I felt in his incongruous poverty. I say incongruous. In him, poverty was that; he would have *become* wealth, I saw at the very first of our acquaintance, and he did not know what to do with poverty! There to me lay the glamour of his position. He'd practically camped with me in my Kimberley shack for a fortnight. I'd come to feel almost an older brother to him. And I became his guest at Durban.

"And there, his charm — in those days he had that beyond question — matured quickly. I met those nearest him, and realized that he'd marry, the instant he'd the money to do it, and go home. And I decided I'd help him to. I meant to get him interested in speculating. I

was going to control his investments, and make him win heavily. And I could have done it! Remember, I had a tremendous fortune and Kimberley was swelling it. Personally, I considered the thing as good as done.

"Then, one night, Bradbroke took me to the Regent Club. I'd been there repeatedly with him, and liked the place. I had heard an old soldier tell a story there once. He had told it to a crowd of us. The old chap had been warning us not to run the risk of angering any of the local witch-doctors, and his story had been of the punishment measured out, by one of these nGaka, to a white man who had defied him. The narrative had been truly horrible; but I had forgiven the old man the horror, and forgotten it. He wasn't there on this evening I'm talking about. But Carstairs and Chadwell and Fraser and Paxton were, men I'd come to know well as friends of Bradbroke. And the place was as comfortable as ever (though it was a broiling night in February), for there was just our own little crowd there, lots of champagne and ice, pipes, cigarettes, black cigars and Irresponsibility. . . .

"Midnight, next. Only the six of us, still, in the low, wide-walled room, when, without announcement, there entered the wildest figure in the world, one of these witch-doctors of the Zulus. By heaven! I can see him *now* as clearly as I see you! He broke in on us like a Death's Head; and the obstinate brute began his tricks, ignoring the fact we hardly paid any attention to what he did. But, little by little, he made us watch him, for his work was his own, and far from the usual. Some of his performance was new to me; and, as he went on, he improved in novelty until we'd forgotten our impatience and watched

him with all our eyes. If you've seen any of his order, there's no need of my describing; but, if you've not, take my word his powers were unimaginable. Then, the very wonder of it began to pall on us. I'd had enough. And so it seemed with the others, for pretty soon they told him to clear out. You should have seen him then! Pride of craft, contempt of our understanding — call it what you will — he glared down at us, from his tremendous height, like an outraged king.

"And it was probably that manner of his, and his egotism that started the men off: Bradbroke laughed at him, and told me the man was a fake. Then, some of the other fellows, in particular Fraser, ridiculed the witch-doctor and explained every trick he'd worked. How he leaped then! He threatened, and we laughed at him. We forgot what the old soldier had said to us. And Fraser almost literally kicked the nGaka from the room. Then, he sent his curse on us. It was to be death soon for us. He said that I, because I had derided him the least, should be the last man in the room to die. Then, his curse launched, he went from us. Have you seen mist sift through a hedge or a forest? That, and only that, can describe his passage from the room.

"'That's a new one to me,' one of my hosts said, with a laugh.

"'It's a new one to me, too,' said another, an older man. But he did not laugh.

"'I imagine they have to vary their programme, like other artists,' I said carelessly. And yet, the nGaka's words had obtruded themselves on me to such an extent that it was only from an odd nervousness, that I had

taken refuge in artificiality. I am not a nervous man, but I identified my sensations as at least nervousness, and, angry at myself for so failing what my self-pride had said I was, I employed another subterfuge: I went to the piano and knocked out a song we'd all sung earlier in the evening. I sang it through as a *solo;* then swung 'round on the stool, little assisted by the fact that the rest had not joined in. They were sitting exactly as when I had turned my back on them. They had not spoken. And they said nothing now. It was too much: I got to my feet, thanked them none too warmly for the pleasure of the evening, ignored the latest incident, as far as the prophecy went, and said good-night to my hosts.

"At that, four of them sprang up, attempting some explanation. The fifth man, Fraser, did not rise. When we spoke to him, he did not answer. I believe we were only surprised, at first; but it was not surprise after we had looked more closely at him, and found that he was inert as a bag. We called in a doctor, a man named Hammerstone, Chadwell had remembered seeing, a couple of hours back, in the main living-room; and he took Fraser out. Ten minutes later, Paxton — the man with the voice — came back from where he'd gone with the doctor; and I can see, now, the look in his eyes, when he told us that Fraser had not regained consciousness — that he was *dead.* After what seemed an interminable interval, Doctor Hammerstone came back to us; and we told him of the witch-'doctor,' though agreeing that he hadn't been closer than ten feet to Fraser, so couldn't possibly have touched him or given him anything.

"Hammerstone heard us out, then said he didn't see

any novelty in any part of it; told us not to let it get on our nerves, and reminded us that we were in South Africa. Told, in his turn, of the nGaka's prophecy, Hammerstone called it a *coincidence*. A coincidence? We tried to call it that. But the man was *dead!* Still, we left the thing with the doctor, and agreed not to talk about it. Chadwell, I mean Bradbroke, said he'd come in and see me, the first thing in the morning, and we separated. I went back to my rooms, to sleep brokenly, when, at last, I got to sleep.

"I waited as long as I could the next day for Bradbroke; then, unable to keep in my rooms any longer, went out and walked about the city, just using up the time. When, I got back to the rooms, Bradbroke was waiting, and his eyes and in fact every detail of his appearance made me wonder how so tragic caricature of his former self had managed to find his way about. No matter! I did what I could for him, and finally got him soothed: I reiterated that the thing of the night before was what Hammerstone had called it — a coincidence, and that we'd forget it in a week, or else believe, by then, the report we had not contradicted — that Fraser had skipped the country, dodged his debts, a way-out conceived by the doctor, who had promised to bury the body secretly.

"My first thought had been to leave South Africa and the beginning tragedy. But I considered the idea only to abandon it, for, if danger did threaten me, it was invisible and inevitable, and flight would not mean escape from it. Moreover — but there's no need of going into *that*. I wrote home I should remain where I was *indefinitely* — and I meant just that — and settled myself in Durban.

"Little by little, we five who remained — that is, Carstairs, Paxton, Chadwell, Bradbroke, and I — fell into the habit of doing things together. And this pretty soon whittled down to our meeting, night after night, in one of the less frequented rooms at the Regent Club. We spoke irregularly; and yet there was little that we kept back. We had been cast apart a bit — I mean them from me, on the first evening after my arrival in Durban, but had caught up our association readily; and this, which we five had now met with, made that association a veritable brotherhood. Did I, for my own part, believe the witch-doctor's prophecy? I hardly know. We didn't compare notes much. We were trying to go on as if nothing had happened — as if Fraser had not *gone*. Unquestionably, our rôle was an effort. Our relationship was the strangest that men have ever known!

"Then, Hugh Chadwell went from us. I put it that way. There had come a flood in a mine his company worked in the Transvaal. The superintendent up there described Chadwell's death as heroic. But what those of us left thought of it was that we'd been mad to hope that even Fraser's death had been 'a coincidence.' I remember saying I hadn't been able to follow the doctor at any time, and they owned up to the same thing. But, even so, Chadwell's exit struck us like an avalanche: we'd gotten pretty well back into our old way of looking at things, taken up the old life — you know what I mean: hunting, tennis, and cricket; we'd even begun, under Bradbroke's coaching, rehearsing a play, the club theatricals. But now ——!

"If Paxton and Chadwell and Bradbroke and Car-

stairs and I had been intimate, Paxton and Carstairs and Bradbroke and I were inseparable: we dined together that night, I mean locked ourselves in my rooms and agreed never to get apart: we were going to keep right on through It *together*. I urged this, and the other three agreed with me. Then, Paxton, the singer, broke out, saying he was off to his own rooms, couldn't stand talking about it any longer. He was blue as indigo. I sent Bradbroke and Carstairs after him, to overhaul him, and then, to escape from something stronger even than my fear was, I took the first train I could get for Kimberley. Not fear, but Love drove me. Doomed as I was, I held myself barred from it. I've said I boarded the Kimberley train. Just ahead of me, in the same carriage, I saw Bradbroke and Carstairs. I went in on them, acted the part of the discoverer of *their* flight, and forced them to return with me to Durban.

"We got there sometime in the night, and, by common assent, went about looking for Paxton. He had been terribly overwrought — with all his musician's nerves — before we had gone off. I, personally, feared the worst. And it seemed that Bradbroke and Carstairs had felt the same dread, rather the same dread *certainty*, so that it was corroboration more than surprise, when we went to his rooms and found his note saying that he hadn't been able to stand it out any longer, and *had gone after Fraser and Chadwell*. After we'd read that note, I burned it. There was no need of keeping it: we remembered well enough what he had said. Carstairs, I remember, commented favourably on it, and wondered where Paxton'd be *found* and *buried*. But I didn't see the good in dwelling on it,

and evidently Bradbroke felt as I did, for he fell in with me, after a little, and Carstairs cut it out.

"The two had been badly off before Chadwell had gone, but *now* they were past all words: they began to make odd deductions from trifles, to *look* very oddly. It was more than mere morbid hysteria; and at last the Thing — I don't know what better to call it — got on them so heavily that I suggested our going off for a little vacation somewhere. After a while they agreed to it. It was going to be a little run to the Cape. They were going to meet me at the Rennie dock, from which the *Inanda* sailed at midnight. . . . Bradbroke met me there on time, and we wondered what was keeping Carstairs. Carstairs didn't show up at all. The *Inanda* sailed with our luggage, and Bradbroke and I went to Carstairs' rooms. There was no note left, just his stuff packed and tagged with Bradbroke's name and mine on it — divided up between us, each getting what he'd thought we'd like. But the words,

"'*Gone after Paxton and Chadwell and Fraser*'

seemed to stare from every corner and cranny of that silent room.

"That night Bradbroke came to live with me! I have told you something of his manner, his plight, and his personality, as I first found it, and, though, later, I was to know him the least magnetic of them all, I still pitied him. And, even if I had not, his coming to me, after Carstairs' exit, would have seemed to me the one natural thing in all the distorted world. For, you see, it had about come down to this: the witch-doctor had said that I was to outlive the other five; on its face, not an alarming state-

ment, since, even crediting it, the five who were to go first, were young and in the pink of health; if anything, that prophecy had meant good, old age to me — I say *on the face of it.* But four had gone in a trifle less than a month, and that altered the situation very considerably. Just as Paxton's leaving had pushed the prospect nearer to those of us who, with him, had survived Fraser and Chadwell, the exit of Carstairs brought It still closer to me and Bradbroke, in a far more than proportionate degree. Another, and perhaps clearer, way of stating it is that, while Carstairs lived, he had stood between It and Bradbroke; and, now that Carstairs was out, only Bradbroke stood between It and me. And so I decided to see that nothing happened to Bradbroke, the man with whom, as he came to be later, I should have had, under anything like ordinary conditions, very little of anything to do.

"I've said that Bradbroke came to share my rooms with me. He did more than that: he hardly left my sight. This meant his giving up his under-secretaryship at the consulate, and deprived him of even that small salary. But I saw that he did not lose by that: I opened a business in Durban taking him in as my partner. I made money as always, and gave him his half. And my Siamese twin became quite likable. Even then, though, he would have his blue times, and the upshot of it was that I got him speculating, under my guidance — my earlier, I should say, my first plan for him, the plan I had made when I had first discovered his fix and determined to lift him from his exile. But never mind about *that!* I saw to his speculations, made him financially fit, taking from

my own holdings when I had to, for I wasn't going to have him worrying his health down or doing anything like the other four. And he responded at once: got a string of ponies, some horses and dogs and the rest of it. And, ever I shielded and guarded him. I *had* to, for he was my protection, my safeguard, he was *The Man Between!* So, cost me what he might, I kept him on! When he got restive, I bought back his good humour. When, as not infrequently happened, he grew downright reckless and threatened to follow the others, I gave him another tip on the market, and made it a heavy one; and I imagine that Fortune saw my position and pitied me, for I never lost, and Bradbroke got more and more and more. I've never figured up his winnings, but I must have turned him at least one hundred thousand pounds, for the speculations always won out, and we were doing admirably in our business — the importing and exporting of Australian wools. We were hauling in money, Bradbroke and I; and he was standing between me and ——!

"Then Bradbroke married. What would any one of you have done in my place? I believe that they had been engaged for some little time, even before he had come out with her and her people from England to South Africa. Without once speaking to him of it, I had done all in my power to obstruct the marriage. I don't mean that there was anything wrong with Bradbroke. It was just that there was *nothing* between *him* and what had already taken Fraser and Chadwell and the two others. Still, when it was done, it was *done* — I mean their marriage, and I gave them a bungalow.

"Moreover, I had to admit that the marriage seemed

almost justified by their happiness. It was good to see. Then it became too good: it made me lonely. I'd thought I could *imagine* something of how it was, but the Bradbrokes made me *see* it, see how out of it, how utterly alone I was. That is what I mean when I say that it became too good — for me.

"Then," and, for the first time, the big man's voice went, and he turned his eyes, for a moment from the brown face of the sailor and the more colourless faces of the other men, "she became so dear to me that, to see her without telling her, was a thing impossible. She had come to Durban from England, arriving the very evening that I reached Durban, with Bradbroke, from Kimberley. She had been what we should call, in America, a school-friend of Bradbroke's wife. I had met her at once. The first time I had seen her, I — *knew*. I had blamed Bradbroke for marrying, and knew that, in seeking marriage with Her, I should be only a degree less culpable. I knew that the right was not mine. Yes, from what it cost me to admit it, I knew that right was not mine. I asked her to go back to her home in England. We told the truth to each other, and she went home immediately.

"For the sake of new scenes — I was beyond, and thankful to be beyond, the power of forgetting — I went to Kimberley. It was not the first time that I had been out of striking distance of Bradbroke. Indeed, since his marriage, he had gotten on very well without my oversight. And, even if he had not, I should not have been able to endure Durban, after She had gone from it. I had died, that moment that the steamer had carried her

from me, with the flowers I had brought for her held to her lips and breast. I wanted only the corporeal release now. I cared not what became of Bradbroke. His turn might come when it would. I went to Kimberley to wait for *my* turn to come to *me*. Yet, at last, suddenly made fearful by something, I went back to Durban only to find that the Bradbrokes had returned to England.

"For the first, it rocked me — I mean I had not once expected it. And yet there was no real reason why not: except for our memories, and the doom, assured, but, in a way, gotten used to, Bradbroke and I were free agents, freed, until the last, fast approaching moment, by the very *certainty* of our doom. We were both waiting, could do only that, and it did not matter where. So I sold out my holdings in Durban and Kimberley. I had no definite idea of where I should go. You see, I had practically cut loose from America. South Africa had come to be home to me: I had met Her there, and it was my nearest approach to — at least, there was not one thing to determine my choice of ports. I was waiting for death and I gave myself to the current. By a force stronger and more cruel than any you can conceive of, I had been cut adrift.

"I wandered then, tried this place and that, a week, a month, or longer — until I had found the latest intolerable. By this time, Bradbroke had replied to me, and wrote steadily, not of England, but of the hour when his Waiting would be done. Then, the last that I had from him: She had married. I could not bring myself to write to her, but I did my best at a letter to Bradbroke. It

was returned to me with the word that, the day before, very suddenly, he had died.

"My wandering was done then, I told myself. Death now would soon take pity on me. And, because I wanted to die in the land I'd been born in, I sailed for America. But my release tarried, and, to perfect my solitude, I buried myself alive in the remotest North. Not there either. I descended, and, quite at random, and wrought-out by my waiting, I stopped at Victoria. And there, one night, with some one against whom Chance had cast me, I went to the Victoria Club. We had something, and I was almost in the act of going, when I happened to look across to where a man was sitting at a table, on the other side of the room, alone. I excused myself to my host, as I could, saying that, one day, I should find him and tell him. Then, I went over to the man who sat alone:

"'*Fraser*,' I said, 'you let me think you died, two years ago, in Durban. Now what was the truth of it?'

"He looked once up at me, and his lips said, 'Good God!'

"'Come where we can't be interrupted,' I told him, and he slowly led the way.

"'The truth,' he repeated, indistinctly, when we were again seated.

"'The truth,' I said, 'and nothing but the truth. *Begin!*' And the truth was this: They were remittance-men, back those two years in Durban, earning little, getting hardly more than that from their home people, and living, without hope of recoupment, wholly beyond their means. And, when they saw me, and heard, as all did, of my amazing luck at Kimberley, they thought that I

represented a chance for their reimbursing. It was Bradbroke's plan. He had not conceived it so early as our first meeting, at my shack at Kimberley. It did not come until later when, driven desperate by his poverty and the hopelessness of another, he had slipped a step, slid down a full degree in the moral strata, and realized, suddenly, that he must have money, by whatever means. And it was while he had groped about, unconscious of his moral lesion and sped by his obsession, that he heard that terrible story told at the club by that old, believing soldier. That gave him his idea. I believe that, almost simultaneously with it, he conceived his plan: the old soldier had been deceived by the verisimilitude of a witch-doctor, and, Bradbroke reasoned, why might not another white man be? Why might not *I* be? That, I say, must have been how his thoughts ran. And, while I pitied him and planned voluntarily to equip him with money, he launched his plot to secure funds from me through fraud:

"Having joined Fraser and Chadwell and Paxton and Carstairs to himself as fellow-conspirators, he brought the witch-doctor in on us, that night, at the Regent, first posting him so that he could amaze me as he did; then, when my mood was right, they advanced a step and had him perform his telepathic trick; then they negotiated his rage and his curse and his 'prophecy' that I, as least offending, should outlive the other five. To give this the desired 'colour,' Fraser had feigned, and Hammerstone, a bribed physician, as desperate as they, had corroborated, the fiction of Fraser's *death*.

"Further, then, to convince me into believing, Chad-

well and Paxton had vanished — through the most consummate of acting — leaving only Carstairs, Bradbroke, and myself. Then Carstairs had gone out, leaving only Bradbroke and me, he, by his incredibly clever characterization, to appear as the only barrier between myself and death, as such to be maintained by me and supplied plentifully with money upon which not only he but Hammerstone and the rest of them should live. That was what their every step had been aimed at! I was never to know. If I so wished, I could commit suicide. I could suit myself about the way out of it. Their concern went only to my money. And their design worked out even better than they had planned. Remorse? Oh, yes, I believe so: Bradbroke had puzzled me with that, from time to time. Fraser said that the horror of the thing got on them so, at the way it worked on me, that they'd gladly have drawn back, if they could, after Chadwell went; but they'd got in too far, by that time. And that and their fear that I might find them out any moment, made them, in fact *enabled* them, to play the thing off with the incredible plausibility and convincingness that they did. Fraser said it wasn't long before their nerves had all gone so that they almost believed the Thing *themselves*. He said it was a hell on earth to them; that they went almost mad with the horror of it — they were new to crime. Horror? Yes. But, to theirs compare the horror that was *mine!* Live through, *for one moment*, a part of what *I* sustained *for two years!* What was, or is or ever can be, their remorse — which Fraser told — to *me?*

"'And now,' I asked Fraser, when he had finished.

"'Bradbroke keeps his part of the contract.' Fraser's voice had gone; but he managed somehow to get out the words.

"'You mean he still sends you your fifth of the money I gave him and made for him?'

"'Yes,' said Fraser, with a look in his eyes which told me that he'd been punished enough. 'And ——'

"'And?'

"'He's come into the title now, and has got me something in the Government office here.'

"'Chadwell,' I asked, 'taking you in the order in which you 'died'?"

"'The same thing, except he's in Washington.'

"'Paxton and Carstairs the same?'

"'At Vancouver and Ottawa!"

The American rose, and went across to the Earl of Leighton, whom the three older men had forgotten. But now, as they looked at him, it was almost in pity, for the man seemed suddenly to have withered, and his pinched face was blue and gray.

"*Bradbroke,*" the man from America was saying, "they know now what I meant when I said that, compared to what I have seen under the British flag, our extortions in America are *crude.* But enough of that. I know the force which controlled you, and ask you only this: *did you lie to me about her wedding, too?*"

The Earl's head moved: he was nodding.

For an instant the American's face was such that the others sprang forward. But he had mastered himself before they could have interposed.

"She is *there!*" The peer motioned through the open

door into the drawing-room. "She — has — heard you, and — waits for you. Ormsby — Ormsby!" The man got to his feet. "*Ormsby!*"

But Ormsby did not hear him. Heaven had opened: he held his English violet in his arms.

THE END

NOV 6 - 1940